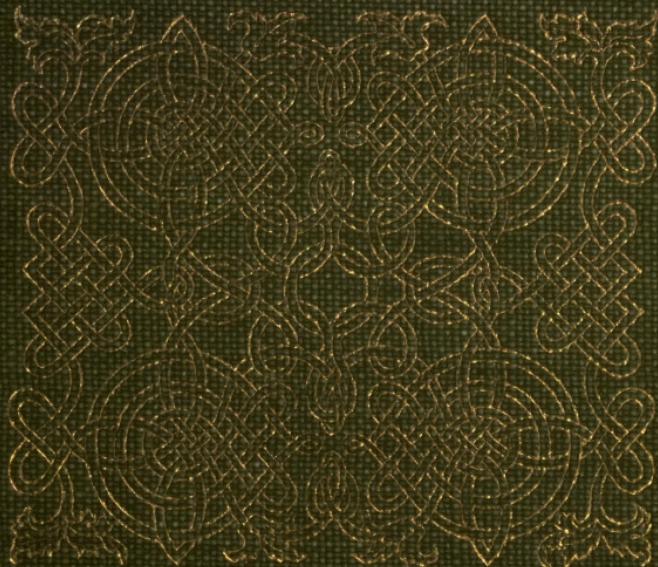
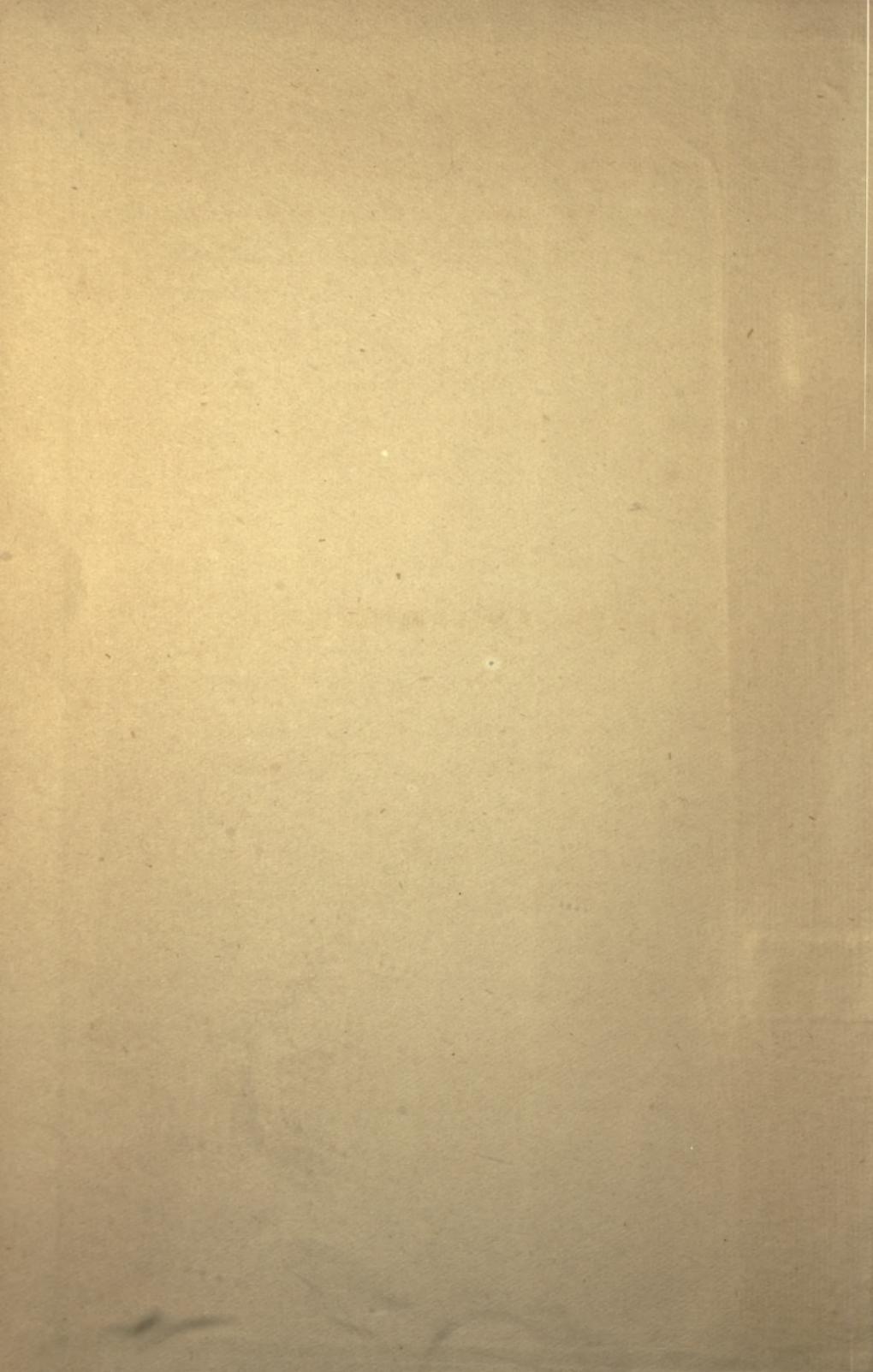


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SCENES AND PORTRAITS

“MATRI CARISSIMAE”

SCENES AND PORTRAITS

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PREFACE

IT is a necessity of the human mind to give everything a name, thus recognising a difference between one thing and another, and recording it. Science, which is the highest development of this necessity, recognises, and records systematically, all the facts of experience, distinguishing one from another, by the most minute analysis. The Maoris even go so far as bestow on their greenstone clubs, on their *tikis*, and on almost every separate article, a distinct name, as if recognising an individuality, much as the old myth-makers spoke of the sword Excalibur ; but the average man is usually very loose in his application of terms. Renan in his preface to " Dialogues Philosophiques " writes : " La grande majorité des hommes . . . se divise en deux catégories, à égale distance desquelles il nous semble qu'

est la vérité. ‘Ce que vous cherchez est trouvé depuis longtemps,’ disent les orthodoxes de toutes les nuances. ‘Ce que vous cherchez n’est pas trouvable,’ disent les positivistes pratiques (les seuls dangereux), les politiques râilleurs, les athées.” Having thus differentiated his own position, from that of either school, one is a little surprised to find Matthew Arnold saying of him, that “the greatest intellect in France has declared for materialism.” One recognises how pernicious the loose application of terms may be, and is a little irritated to discover a fine English critic lapsing into the vice, even in an unguarded moment. Really, thought, or at least any thought that justifies its existence, is too subtle and fluid a thing to be settled in this off-hand way; and the apparently childish custom of the Maoris is more scientific, since, at least, it recognises individuality.

Turn away from Renan to Euripides, and consider for a moment the present conflict as to whether “The Bacchae” is a recantation by Euripides of his supposed rationalistic

opinions, or a more aggravated expression of them. It seems impossible that there should be two suppositions, so far removed from each other, about an existing book, in a known language, by an author whose style is singularly lucid. “*La chicane s’allonge*,” as Montaigne said. We must seek for the truth at an equal distance from both parties. Those who sustain either of the extreme theories are equally clear and convincing in their arguments. As each party seems to have a personal interest in the matter, we may be certain that it will find what it is looking for, without much trouble; but they both seem to be striving more often after a reputation for themselves than after the real thought of their author. One ingenious critic even goes so far as to assert that Dionysos does not work miracles, but merely hypnotises the chorus into a belief that he has done so, to the great amusement of the audience. Perhaps it is some mental disability which prevents me from enjoying “*The Bacchae*” as a comedy, but I own I cannot. To

Renan and to Euripides one might apply the term *ἀνὴρ διψυχος*. They were both equally saturated with the scientific spirit of their age, though inclining to the mystic temperament. They were both quickened by a deep love and pity for humanity in all its moods and aspirations. They both delighted keenly in popular legends and the mythology of the country-side. Both were strongly individual minds, sensitive, reacting to every contemporary influence, and yet preserving their peculiar distinction in thought and style. Unbound by any system, moving easily in all, they sought by the free exercise of reason and a profound irony to cleanse their ages of much perilous stuff; and though Renan was not a Christian in the common sense of the word, and though Euripides turned away from the gods of his own day, yet each tried to save out of the ruins of their faiths the subtile and elusive spirit which had informed them; that divine light and inspiration, which is continually expressing itself in new figures, and cannot be imprisoned in any vessel of

human fashioning. “*Anima naturaliter Christiana*,” we can say of each. There are in reality only two religions on this little planet, and they perhaps begin and end with man. They are: the religion of the humble folk, whose life is a daily communion with natural forces, and a bending to them; and the religion of men like Protagoras, Lucretius, and Montaigne, a religion of doubt, of tolerance, of agnosticism. Between these two poles is nothing but a dreary waste of formalism, Pharisaism, “perplexed subtleties about Instants, Formalities, Quiddities, and Relations,” all that bewildering of brains which comes from being shut up in a narrow system, like an invalid in a poisoned and stifling room.

I think that all the world’s greatest men have had this quality of double-mindedness. Take, for example, the curious paradox of Epicureanism, which counsels a temperate pleasure, and yet condemns the whole of life as being merely the pursuit of an unattainable desire; reconciling us to life by the prospect

of death, and to death by showing us the vain efforts and innumerable vexations of life. The same double-mindedness partly explains for us the difference between the Socrates of Plato and the Socrates of Xenophon; though we must not overlook the fundamental difference in the biographers. This elusive and various quality of greatness has not, I think, been sufficiently recognised. There is no more suggestive expression of it than the character of Christ as sketched by Oscar Wilde in "De Profundis," which may be supplemented by the masterly delineation of M. Loisy in his prolegomena to "Les Evangiles Synoptiques."

In the following studies, the principal influence is that of Renan; though I profess I cannot gauge its full extent. The discourse of Protagoras owes some of its principles to the dialogue "Certitudes"; but the pivot, upon which the whole question turns, came directly from a study of the "Theaetetus" and the "Protagoras," so that the debt is scarcely perceptible. Protagoras himself practically does not exist for us, we can only evoke a

shadowy image of him from Plato, for whose somewhat reactionary bias full allowance must be made. The result is a vague reflection with blurred outlines, but gracious, and with neither the greed nor the vanity of the other sophists. I do not think that Renan's verdicts have influenced my treatment of St Paul. Renan has a natural prejudice against *ce laid petit Juif*, with his Rabbinical pseudoscience, and his blindness to the beauty of the Greek spirit, his scorn of the "idols," and his misconception of what was meant by "the unknown God." I do not share this prejudice. I am perfectly willing to take a thing for what it is, and not to grumble at it for not being other than it is. The strength of St Paul was like the strength of one of Michelangelo's unfinished statues; the idea is emerging from the marble, but it is still veiled, rude, scarred by the chisel, and not yet quite free of its material.

Machiavelli said that to renew anything we must return to its origins. It is as true in literature as in life. My aim has been to

derive everything from the original source; but it is difficult to avoid being touched by contemporary influences. The majority of these, in my case, have been French. I am indebted for the two characteristic letters of Innocent III. to Achille Luchaire's admirable history of that Pope, which he fortunately lived to finish; and to the always fascinating Gaston Boissier for his various work on Rome. I am under a deep obligation to Mr L. Arthur Burd, as are all English students of Machiavelli. Finally, I am indebted, more than I can say, to M. l'Abbé Houtin for his interest and encouragement, and to Mr Arthur Galton for his example and conversation.

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To ARTHUR GALTON

I

THE KING OF URUK

SCENES AND PORTRAITS

I

THE KING OF URUK

WHEN Merodach, the King of Uruk, sate down to his meals, he made his enemies his foot-stool ; for beneath his table he kept an hundred kings, with their thumbs and great toes cut off, as living witnesses of his power and clemency. When the crumbs fell from the table of Merodach, the Kings would feed themselves with two fingers ; and when Merodach observed how painful and difficult the operation was, he praised God for having given thumbs to man.

“ It is by the absence of thumbs,” he said, “ that we are enabled to discern their use. We invariably learn the importance of what we lack. If we remove the eyes from a man we deprive him of sight ; and consequently we learn that sight is the function of the eyes.”

Thus spake Merodach, for he had a scientific mind, and was curious of God's handiwork ; and when he had finished speaking the courtiers applauded him.

"Great is the power of the Great King, and most wonderful is his wisdom," cried the courtiers ; and the King shook out his napkin under the table, shaking the crumbs among his prostrate enemies, for the applause was pleasant to him ; but from beneath the table came a harsh, sarcastic voice.

"Great is the power of the Great King, and most wonderful is his wisdom," said the voice ; "but neither from his power nor from his wisdom can he fashion us new thumbs."

Then was Merodach angry, and he bade his courtiers seize the speaker and draw him from beneath the table ; and the man they drew out was Shalmaneser, who had been a king among the kings of Chaldæa. And at first Merodach was of a mind to kill Shalmaneser ; but, seeing that his captive sought for death, his heart relented, and he bade his courtiers restore him to his place beneath the table.

"My power and my wisdom are great," he said ; "since I have so afflicted mine enemies that they fear not to tell me the truth."

And when Merodach had eaten, he rose

from the table and went out into the gardens of the terrace where the nightingales were singing ; but the kings beneath the table smote Shalmaneser sorely upon both cheeks, and upon his buttocks, and tore out the hair of his beard ; for after that he had spoken, Merodach had shaken out the crumbs from his napkin among them no more, and they had supped poorly.

Then Merodach wandered about in his garden, listening to the song of the nightingales who nested there, and smelling the sweet smells of the flowers that were odorous in the cool of the evening ; and behind him, fifty paces, there followed his guards, for he was afraid for his life. The dew fell upon the glazed bricks, gleaming in the moonlight, and hung from the trees and flowers like little trembling stars. Merodach leaned his arms upon a balustrade and looked over the city which he had builded on the left bank of the Euphrates, and watched the illuminated barges that went up and down the river, rowing with music upon the waters ; and he looked toward the high temples looming into the night, and he thought of his glory and was exceeding sad.

“ In a little time I die,” he said ; “ but the

city which I have builded will be a witness for me while man survives on the earth."

And from the barges came the pleasant sound of music, floating through the night, and Merodach regretted that he would have to die, and in a little while would walk no more through his garden in the cool of the evening, listening to the sounds of life, and smelling the sweet breath of the flowers.

"In a little while the race of man will have perished from off the earth," he said ; "and there will be no memory of me, but the stars will shine still above my ruined and tenantless palace."

And the night-wind, laden with scents and sounds, shook the dew from the trembling leaves, and moved his silken raiment ; and Merodach was overcome with a passion for life.

"In a little time," he thought, "even the stars will have vanished."

And from the adjoining gardens of his harem he heard the voices of women waiting to pleasure their lord ; and he went in unto them for he feared to be alone.

In the garden of Merodach's harem, the Queen Parysatis held a feast in honour of

her daughter, the Princess Candace, who was eleven years old. The Queen Parysatis lay upon a pile of cushions looking at a tragedy that was being enacted by a company of eunuchs. The Princess Candace was standing beside a deep basin of silver, seventy cubits in diameter, called the Sea of Silver; and she threw sugar-plums to a troop of little girls, who dived after them, gleaming fish-like in the luminous depths. When she saw the King, her father, she stopped throwing sugar-plums, and the little girls came out of the water, and sate upon the silver rim, their wet, naked limbs glimmering in the moonlight. Then the Princess Candace did homage before Merodach, bowing down before him and touching his feet; and he stretched forth his hand to her, and led her to a couch, because he loved his children, and she was as beautiful as the new moon before it is a day old.

Now it chanced that at that time the High-priest Bagoas, who was High-priest of the temple of Bel at Nippur, was in the palace of the King; and Merodach sent for him, desiring him to speak comfortable doctrine and words cheering to the heart; and Bagoas came in unto Merodach, and did homage

before him, bowing down before him and touching his feet ; and there was no one in the cities of Babylonia more powerful than Bagoas, unless it were the King himself.

“ As I walked in the garden in the evening,’ said Merodach, “ I became afflicted with a sense of human transience and of the vanity of greatness. In a little time, I said, I shall be but a handful of dust. Then I comforted myself with the thought that I should live in the memory of man, through my monuments, while man survives upon the earth ; but in a little time man himself disappears, I said, and even the stars are lost in darkness.”

And Bagoas smiled.

“ It is true, O King, man cometh upon the earth and rules it for a little space, like a god. In hollow ships, he sails over the pathless sea ; and he has mapped out the heavens naming the stars ; and he follows the courses of the planets round the sun ; and he knoweth the seasons of reaping and sowing, by the constellations rising or setting in the sky. His cunning mind has devised screws to draw water up out of the earth, and pulleys and levers to uplift masses beyond his strength. He is a master of populous cities, a weaver of delicate textures, a limner of images in

fair colours; he is a tamer of horses, skilled in the knowledge of flocks and herds; with hooks he draweth fish out of the sea, and with an arrow transfixes a bird on the wing; he fashions the metals in fire, beating the gold and stubborn bronze to his will. He understands the laws of Nature, and has named the force which draws the earth round the sun, and the moon round the earth; but time is his master, and he cannot find a remedy against death."

"Nor fashion a thumb for man," said Merodach.

"The fear of death is the greatest incitement to live," continued Bagoas. "It is the goad which incessantly urges us to action. Our desire to live, to persist in one form or another, impels us to beget children, to overpower the imagination of future ages by the splendour of our monuments and the record of our lives. We seek to stamp our image upon our time, and influence our generation by every means in our power. But even this is not enough, so we have built ourselves a little world beyond the grave, a little haven beyond the waves of time. We believe that our souls will exist when our bodies have fallen into decay and escaped into a thousand

different forms of new life, to be woven eternally on the loom of perpetual change. We believe that death is merely a transition, and that through virtue man is able to scale the brazen ramparts of the city of the gods.

“If he is very good,” said the Princess Candace.

“Little Princess,” said Bagoas, smiling, “your beauty is like a bright rainbow in the sky; the sunlight streaming upon drifting rain. Have you ever considered the personality of man, O King? Everything that has existed in the past exists in the soul of man. In its depths are the primeval monsters, Apsu and Tiamat. In its heights are enthroned the gods; action in it is heaped upon action to become habit, and habit upon habit to become character; all that we have seen, all that we have touched, the experience of the senses, the illusions of the brain, the desires of the heart, our ancestors, our companions, our country and occupations, all move and work mysteriously in our being. Each has left its trace upon the personality of man. Do you seek immortality for these? You will leave them with the world. Seek for yourself before you seek for self’s immortality. Beneath what you seem to be lies what you

think you are, and beneath that again lies what you are indeed."

"Alas," cried Queen Parysatis, "such an immortality is too unsubstantial. It is our illusions, our experiences, and our aspirations, which give a savour to existence. What is the use of immortality if we leave everything we love?"

"Mankind, O King," answered Bagoas, "loves its imperfections more than its perfections, and values as nothing an immortality which is devoid of our human frailties, our pitiful human friendships, our personal predilections which we obtusely term our principles."

"It is true," said Merodach, "I die; but that which is mortal of me remains upon earth to be a witness for me in the memory of man."

"The whole of recorded time is but a second, a pulsation, in the ages," answered Bagoas, "and the memory of man is the frailest of monuments. The Temple of Bel at Nippur is not two thousand years old; yet its bricks are engraven with a dead language, and we know not its builder's name. So it will be with thy temples and cities, O King!"

"I have said it," answered Merodach.

“Perhaps after thousands of years have lapsed,” continued Bagoas, “a peasant will find a brick with thy name upon it, and cast it aside, or tread it under foot. But even to-day I have met and spoken with a man in whose horoscope it was written that his name would be remembered while man exists upon the earth; yet he is naked, and his house is a cabin of boughs.”

“Was it foreshadowed that he would become King?” enquired Merodach anxiously.

“No; his inheritance is poverty and pain.”

“What is his name?” enquired the King.

“His name is Adam,” answered Bagoas.

Then there was a silence in the garden of the King’s harem; and Merodach wondered that the memory of one who went naked, and dwelt in a cabin of boughs, should outlast the memory of a King before whom the nations trembled, who went clothed in purple and fine linen, and whose palace was built of thirty-five million bricks. But he consoled himself with the thought that eventually even Adam would be forgotten, and the lights of Sirius and Aldebaran extinguished.

“Tell me of Adam,” he said to Bagoas; and the Princess Candace drew closer to listen.

“Our life, O King, is a series of accidents,” said Bagoas. “A little thing is sufficient to divert the whole course of our progress; it has even been said by our philosophers that the world itself is an accident, and that God is chance. I am inclined to believe, being old-fashioned, in Providence; for chance is merely a cause that is imperceptible, and if the deflection of atoms falling through space caused the world, that deflection was the result of some feature peculiar to the atoms themselves. I believe that, if the world were formed in this way, the cause was inherent in the atoms, and I believe that the progress of each man through life is derived from causes inherent in himself. But the operations of the human mind are so far removed from our experience, and so elusive in themselves, that we cannot explain them otherwise than by saying that Bel, by the hands of his angels, puts into man’s mind ideas of good or of evil according to the purpose of his inscrutable wisdom. The greater part of man’s life is purely spontaneous, sensible rather than reasonable in so far as the majority of our actions do not result from any reflective process, and hence it is unreasonable to ask a man to give reasons for all his acts, as it

would be to ask you, O King, to give a reason for your last campaign."

"That was a reason of State," said Merodach simply.

"The reason was the reason of a great King, whose wisdom is as inscrutable as the wisdom of Bel," answered Bagoas. "It was a lapse of the mind that led me to Adam; one might say almost an act of Providence, or to be scientific, chance. This morning at daybreak I had a desire to ride abroad, for I had not slept during the night, and the sweetness of the air enticed me into the country. I took a falcon upon my wrist. Falconry was a delight of my youth. But I had barely proceeded a mile before I became preoccupied with my own thoughts. The hares passed me unobserved; the doves were free of the air. I was thinking how often man has crept up toward civilisation, and then receded from it again, as the tides creep up and recede from the beach; how the light of the world has passed from nation to nation, and none have brought it to the goal; how man forgets the evils which the last generation had abolished, and rushes back upon them to escape from present evils; and it seemed to me impossible that our race could attain to perfection in

conditions of such mutability. We sow our wisdom with full hands. We think that it may increase fifty-fold. Alas! some of our seed falls in marshy places, some among stones, some is devoured by the birds of the air, some flourishes exceedingly, and is beaten down by storms of hail, or withered by the fierce heat; and that which survives and bears fruit is scarcely sufficient for the sowing of the field again.

“Every night a priest of Bel watches the stars; with optic glasses he explores the vast abyss, through which the sun and its choir of planets journey toward their fate; and when his mind is troubled by that infinity, his eyes seek thy city, O King, and mankind to him is but a little heap of withered leaves, which a sudden wind whirls in a circling dance. From his tower, O King, he looks upon thy city, which to us, from here, is splendid with a multitude of lights, and murmurous with life. He knows that in the streets the young man is seeking pleasure, that women are bearing children, that the old are dying. All the wealth and misery of the world are at his feet; and he turns again to that star which is destined to burn up the world in a tumultuous kiss. What is the lust of the young to him;

the pangs of child-birth ; the bitterness ; the regret ; the anguish of approaching death ? A little heap of withered leaves suddenly caught up in a windy dance ; a little flame, flickering ere it goes out into darkness.

“ From this spirit of detachment in the philosopher is bred a corresponding spirit of aloofness in the multitude. They see the towers of Bel, black against the evening sky, and the watcher to them is but a man enamoured of the silence, smitten with madness by the stars ; a man whose life is in the future, whose wisdom is but a sure foreknowledge of death and fate, whose very presence among them is a prophecy of corruption and change ; and they ask, well may they ask ! what is his wisdom worth to us ? The days are blue and gold, blue and silver are the nights ; and the birds are clamorous among the dripping boughs ; why should we pause to think of fate ? What does his wisdom profit him when in a little time he dies, and is equal with us in the dust ? The flowers bud, blossom, and seed, without thought for the departing year ; the birds go delightfully upon the ways of the wind, though the arrows which shall bring them to earth are stored in the quiver. Shall we do otherwise ?

“Truly the worshipper of wisdom is a lonely man. The results which he obtains are never the possession of the many. They may excite the curiosity of the few, they may become an affectation with the amateur, but they do not touch the multitude, for to this last that only is good which is good in its immediate effect. Miserable indeed, the race of man seemed to me, O King; content that their mortal ambition should be bounded by the limits of a day; seeking only fat pastures and pleasant waters; and careless of the lot of their progeny, whose fate it is to cover the whole earth with populous cities, and stream like a river of fire, impetuous and consuming, into hidden and desolate places, which only the eyes of the gods have seen as yet. The treasure of wisdom is a treasure which is continually being lost, rediscovered, and lost again. It is like the gold of the miser, hidden in the ground; his son does not inherit it, but after many years some labourer turns it up with his deep-driven ploughshare, and the coins ring against the stones, and lie with tarnished brightness on the loose earth of the furrow.

“A confused murmuring distracted my thought. I seemed to swim back to reality out of a world of dreams. At first I thought

that I had approached a hive of wild bees ; but the humming murmuring noise seemed sweeter, more bird-like, until I saw that it came indeed from a parliament of birds, which had congregated in the boughs of an apple-tree, warbling there, and rising every now and then into the air, with a great rushing of wings, to wheel above the tree and descend upon it again in a thick cloud. I had strayed into a pleasant valley, where the Euphrates flows between level meadows of wild wheat, enclosed, like an amphitheatre, by well-wooded hills, which had already taken on the tawny and golden tints of autumn.

“ On the lower slopes grew mulberries and oranges ; above them, threaded with opulent colouring, plane-trees and sycamores, yellowing oaks, and the beautiful level boughs of dusky cedars, while from all sides came the sound of falling water, chiming and tinkling into little hollows, or thundering in cataracts, with a more imperious music, down precipitous and rocky glens. The sunlit fields of ripe wheat swayed in the wind like an undulating sea ; the river gleamed like silver, and many coloured lilies grew beside the brimming water, filling the air with a delicate perfume. I looked about me in delight. It seemed a

place sacred from the profaning feet of man. At the same time, I had a curious sense of being watched; and presently a young man rose out of the wild wheat before me, and stood watching me, with an expression of curiosity qualified with distrust."

A languid interest was apparent in the faces of his audience.

"It was Adam," said Merodach.

"At last," said Queen Parysatis.

"It was Adam," answered Bagoas, smiling. "I have attempted, O King, to give you some notion of the thoughts which preoccupied me at my meeting with him. My outlook upon things is historical, and therefore necessarily pessimistic. Adam broke in upon my thoughts as a prophecy, a promise. He was in his first manhood, almost still a boy, and represented, in consequence, an earlier stage of evolution. He seemed in fact half child, and half animal. He had the stature of a man; he was well built, muscular, giving one the impression of an immense but graceful strength, of easy movements. His features were handsome, but unlike those usual in our country; the nose was a little rapacious, the mouth cruel, but his eyes were full of dreams. It was the face of one who looks towards

distant horizons, having the immense calm of the desert, and full of a sleeping energy. Youth softened it, and lent it a delicate charm ; but in age it will be terrible. And suddenly I heard a sullen voice saying : ‘ This is my garden.’

“ I have noticed in all nomadic peoples, and in small scattered communities, that however terse the language, and however limited the vocabulary, the words are capable of innumerable shades of meaning. Gesture and modulation lend force and precision to what is said. Perhaps this is why the art of the theatre is always, at its best, the art of a naïve and unsophisticated people. Life in town tends to the production of a type, and individuality is suppressed ; but life in the country, where the conventions are few and simple, tends to the formation of character. The theartic art, among town-dwellers, loses its broad simplicity and that directness of purpose which show man in immediate collision with facts, and is frittered away in mean motives and intangible temperaments, substituting for the play of circumstances the play of ideas. It is for the same reason that great empires always perish at the heart first ; because dwellers in towns become uniform, and being surrounded by

artificial circumstances are seldom brought into direct conflict with facts, but learn to cheat themselves with fine phrases and immaterial ideas."

"The good Bagoas is really a little prolix," whispered Parysatis to Merodach.

Bagoas heard the interruption and continued tranquilly :

"'This is my garden,' said Adam; and his words implied not only that I was an intruder, and that he was a proprietor, but also that the garden was beautiful, and that he was proud of it. I explained that I had lost my way, that I was hungry, that I was tired; and even as I spoke a young woman rose up out of the wheat and looked at me curiously.

"'We have little,' said Adam.

"They led me to their cabin of boughs, and brought me food; and they were naked and were not ashamed. They were strangers to the use of fire, and my meal consisted of nuts and honey, goat's milk and dates, such food as, our poets say, nourished the people of the golden age. In front of their cabin was an apple-tree, similar to the one upon which the birds had congregated, only with golden instead of ruddy fruit. I asked Adam if he would give me an apple from it,

“‘The tree is dedicated,’ he said; ‘and we may not eat of the fruit; it is forbidden to us.’

“‘We may not even touch it with our hands,’ said the woman, who was called Eve; and she looked at the fruit covetously.

“‘To what god is it dedicated?’ I enquired of them.

“‘It is dedicated to God,’ replied Adam simply.

“And I was surprised that this man, who had so many needs, should have only one god; but very soon I found that his monotheism was but a rude crystallisation of the spiritual forces of earth and air, a kind of shamanism, though with the many considered as one. His god was the god of fertility, who had caused the earth to put forth grass, and the trees to bear fruit, and all things to bring forth after their kind; a god whose voice was heard on the wind of the day, and who breathed into man the breath of life. In his loneliness Adam had told himself stories as children do, and, as with children, his imagination had laid hold with such intensity of vision upon these fanciful adventures of his mind that he seemed to live in a little world of his own creating, a land of enchantment

and of dreams. The wind, the waters, the leaves of the never silent trees, the birds and the beasts of the field, all spoke in what was to him an intelligible voice; and his god was a being not far removed from himself, enjoying, even as Adam himself did, the cool of the day, the blithe air, and the breath of the sweet flowers.

“‘How came it that this particular tree should be forbidden to you?’ I enquired of them, for I was curious of the spiritual workings of their minds.

“‘In the day that we came into this garden,’ answered Adam, ‘I had a desire to eat of the fruit, and I stretched my hand toward the tree when I heard a voice upon the wind, saying: “In the day that ye eat thereof ye shall surely die.”’

“‘It is curious,’ I murmured. ‘The fruit is wholesome, one would think that to eat thereof would give life rather than death.’

“‘If we ate of the fruit would we not die?’ enquired Eve.

“‘If ye ate of it you would know,’ I answered, smiling at the simplicity of the question; and then I spoke to Adam of other things. I love the conversation of the young, O King. It brings back to me the time when

I, too, had illusions, hopes, and ideals. The sole illusions remaining to mine old age are the illusion of life, and the hope that where we have failed our children may succeed. Adam believes that all men are naturally good, and that it is society which makes them evil ; he does not see that society cannot be different from what it is since it is a purely natural development, and that its laws were not made by men, but are merely a recognition of certain instincts peculiar to mankind, and of the effects which the exercise of these instincts invariably produces. His point of view is that of the individual ; and the egoism of the individual is always in conflict with the collective egoism of the state. He believes that men are born equal, and that society loads them with chains. He cannot grasp the seeming paradox that what he imagines to be the natural man is really artificial, and that what he imagines to be an artificial society is really the expression of natural laws. Adam himself is not natural, he is kindly and hospitable to strangers, he is gentle, and loves his wife, he is practically a monotheist.

“ Every individual is like Adam in this. We are all idealists. All of us have excellent intentions ; but the world is so constituted

that we can never carry them out. Adam has never been in a great city, but he has seen from afar the huge towers of Uruk looming into the night, and they are to him in their proud invasion of the sky a symbol of man's rebellion against the decrees of God, who fashioned him to be a feeble creature, scratching about upon the surface of the earth, and to draw his whole being from that shallow deposit of productive soil which he cultivates laboriously. He considers our temples to be the work of some demonic agency, for he does not think it possible that beings similar to himself should uplift these gigantic masses into the air. Our works of pride are, therefore, evil to him, since they differ from the works of his native humility; to live like Adam is to live virtuously; and that which is different from his mode of life is evil."

Here Merodach and the Queen Parysatis laughed at the simplicity of Adam, and the Princess Candace also laughed because she did not understand why they were amused. Bagoas looked at his audience with a faint tolerant smile,

"You find Adam's standard of good and evil laughable," he said. "It is in fact a little comic, but human, quite human, and quite

logical. He says in effect : 'I, Adam, am good ; those who differ from me, differ from what is good, and are consequently evil.' This position, which we find so laughable in others, is really common to us all ; only, unfortunately, a sense of humour is a sense which we never apply to ourselves. Who will deny that Adam is wise in limiting his desires to such things as lie easily within his reach, if happiness be the end of wisdom ? The earth gives him of her fulness, the climate of his valley is mild and temperate, snow does not fall there nor is it vexed by winds ; the misery of his fellows is hidden from him, he is without care for the morrow ; in limiting his desires he has extended the possibilities of delight, and joy comes to him unexpectedly as if it were a miracle wrought by God."

"A charming life !" exclaimed the Queen. "Your barbarians are like children."

"Yes ; they are like children," answered Bagoas. "In fact they still are children, and so I have treated them. I cast Adam's horoscope, and read therein the wonderful things which the stars ordain for him. In this horoscope I read that Adam is to be the father of a race which shall revolutionise the world ; a little obstinate people inhabiting

a country in the west toward the sea ; a people of slaves, outraged and despised, yet leavening all the peoples among whom they dwell. It is this race of slaves that will pass on the light and wisdom of Chaldaea to nations as yet unborn. While thy monuments, O King, are sleeping beneath the drifted sands of the desert, the name of Adam will pass from tongue to tongue, and distant peoples will come to think of him as the father of the whole human race. The arts and sciences of Uruk will be forgotten, and the world will be duped by a record of events which never happened, myths and legends stolen from surrounding nations and woven into a curious assymetrical whole, full of contradictions and puerilities.

“ Truly in Adam’s horoscope everything is a contradiction. From being the happiest man, he will become the most miserable ; after a life spent in obscurity he will achieve almost an eternity of fame, and his children, a race of slaves, will impose their law upon the world for nearly two thousand years. It is incredible. Surely my meditation as I rode toward him was not without cause. Our wisdom, the science of Chaldaea, is the miser’s gold which shall be lost in the earth, and whatever of us

survives in the memory of man will survive through the children of Adam. I told him nothing of this, but prophesied that he would be a wanderer until his death, at which he smiled.

“ ‘That may not be,’ he said ; ‘because God has put me into this garden to dress it and keep it.’

“ Then the woman filled a bowl with milk and took it over toward the tree, and a great bronze serpent came out from the roots of the tree and drank the milk which she offered him ; wherefore, in spite of their monotheism, I think that they are of the people who worship snakes and trees, and that the tree was taboo because of the serpent which dwelt in its roots.”

“ It may well be as you say,” said Merodach, after a silence. “ Still it is curious that a monotheist should worship snakes and trees. Perhaps his god is the local djinn ; as with the nomadic tribes, the action of the gods is limited to certain territories, and the wandering herds, in changing their pastures, change their gods also. In effect the King is the god. He rules by divine right, he represents the aspirations of his people, and is the visible symbol without which all religions are but

inarticulate yearnings. You would naturally be interested, as a priest, in the religion of Adam ; but I am more interested in the fact that a nomad should inhabit a garden. It interests me, as a statesman, because it represents the beginnings of society. A nomad wanders for two reasons ; to change his hunting grounds, and to seek fresh pastures. Some nomads, especially in countries where the fertility of the soil is easily exhausted, plough, sow, reap the harvest, and then depart into a new place ; but when fruit-trees are planted the owner remains beside them. Their roots have bound him to the soil. All existing civilisations have arisen through the fact that man gathers the fruit of a tree, and not the tree itself."

Bagoas smiled, and discreetly said nothing.

"To-morrow I shall visit Adam," said Merodach ; "from the unsophisticated there is always much to learn."

"You may be disappointed," said Bagoas gently. "I like the lowly and humble people, and I may have prejudiced you, unwittingly, in Adam's favour. His sincerity may seem to you rude."

"Simplicity of manner is charming," answered Merodach. "I believe that all our

courtly graces, everything which is implied by the word good breeding, have their roots in the natural instincts of man. Of course, the simple people move more awkwardly in the conventional restraints ; and good manners, which we wear like jewellery, are with them heavy fetters ; but I place implicit trust in Adam's natural good taste."

"I should love to see Adam," said the Queen Parysatis.

"But he is naked," objected the Princess Candace.

"We shall bring him some leopard-skins, such as my guards wear," said Merodach. "Come to supper."

They moved through a grove of orange-trees towards a great pavilion where supper was being served. Bagoas left them ; and, leaning on a balustrade, he looked over Uruk.

"Certainly Adam is unfortunate," he said.

II

MERODACH went forth unto Eden, and with him there went his wives and his concubines, his poets and his pastry-cooks, his falconers, his flute-players, and his players upon the

viol, his bow-men and his spearmen ; and the number of those who followed him were ten thousand and ten, without counting the mule-drivers, and the camel-drivers, and the drivers of elephants. And the noise of their going filled the whole land, and a great cloud of dust went up from their feet. Bagoas rode with Merodach upon the King's elephant, whose tusks were studded with precious stones, and who had jewels in his ears, and Bagoas spoke wisely unto the King.

“ Man is naturally vain,” said Bagoas. “ He believes always that he has finally explained the universe, and that nothing remains for him but a life of virtue, and the approbation of a God, who shall exalt him above his fellows. But it seems to me, O King, that all human systems of religion and philosophy have the same nature as the system of a fakir whom I once met in the desert. He told me that the world was supported by a pillar of adamant, which was borne by an elephant, who stood upon the back of a tortoise.”

“ And what supported the tortoise ? ” enquired Merodach curiously.

“ When I asked him that question, O King, he answered that it was a holy mystery, that the question was blasphemous in itself, and that all answers were equally heretical.”

The Queen Parysatis rode with the court poet upon another elephant, and the poet, whose name was Mekerah, made delicate songs for her.

“The old look upon the stars,” sang the poet, “they seek wisdom in the heavens; but I look into the eyes of my beloved. What stars are like her eyes? What wisdom can compare with the wisdom of love?”

“You have said the same thing a hundred times,” complained the Queen.

But the Princess Candace rode upon a white elephant caparisoned with cloth of silver embroidered with pearls. No one rode with her but the driver of the elephant, and she sat under a canopy of silk which was shot with the colours that are in the shell of the pearl, and before her elephant on a white mule rode her juggler. He rode with his face to the tail, and juggled with oranges and a sword; the sword meeting the oranges in the air divided them neatly into halves, and then again into quarters. He was a dwarf, incredibly ugly, hunch-backed, with long spidery arms; but the little Princess loved him.

“Look at me!” he shrilled in a falsetto voice. “Look at me, little Princess! Who

will say that jugglery is not the supreme art ? Verily, it is the art of arts ! The poet does but juggle with words, yet he does not preserve so perfect a rhythm. Mekerah's verses are lame, but mine oranges do not halt ; they dance in the air with the grace of a little Princess who dances in silver slippers before the throne of her father. The High-priest Bagoas juggles with theories ; the Great King juggles with the fears and passions of his subjects ; the gods juggle with our poor world, but I juggle with mine oranges. It is the same thing. Look at me, little Princess, look at me ! ”

He swallowed the fragments of oranges as they descended, and then the sword.

“ Uzal, you will make yourself sick,” said Candace, “ and my maids will have to tend you.”

The juggler stood on his head and juggled with his feet.

“ Truly, my lord,” said Bagoas, “ the juggler of the Princess has good reason for what he says : in a sense we are all jugglers.”

But the King was thinking of other things, and after a moment lifted his head.

“ Have you considered the Princess Candace, how she grows ? ” he enquired of the High-priest.

“She is like a flower,” answered Bagoas. “She is like a silver lily opening its petals to the sun. She grows like a flower that the dew falls upon, and her dreams are like dew.”

“A few days ago she was a child, a few days more and she will be a woman. It is time that she were married; but that man whom she marries will be King after that I am dead, and I do not wish to hasten my death.”

“She is young to go down into the cave of Ishtar,” said Bagoas; “she would tremble when the last torch was extinguished; she would cry aloud when her husband came to her out of that darkness. Have you considered one worthy to be her husband, O King?”

“There is no one,” answered Merodach. “The children of my wives are all girls, and the sons of my slaves are brawlers; men whose words are wind.”

“Have you considered the son of thy cousin, Na'amah? He is sixteen years old, and has the heart of a lion. He is like a young lion in his first strength. I have been the governor of his childhood, and in his heart there is no guile.”

“We shall consider him,” said Merodach.
“Beyond are the hills of Eden.”

“If we follow the course of the river we shall come to Adam’s garden.”

It was mid-day in Eden. The great snake hung in the branches of the apple-tree, watching Adam and Eve, with dull, malignant eyes half-closed. He had shed his skin which hung from one of the branches, swaying idly in the wind, like a piece of grey ravelled lace ; and the great snake coiled about the trunk shone with renewed splendour, like a bronze in which the colours of olive and red are graduated so as to mix and flow into each other through imperceptible shades of difference. The shadow of some domestic quarrel hung over Adam and Eve ; he was moved by an ungracious solicitude for her comfort, and she received his attentions in offended humility. The snake watched the comedy with narrow eyes ; subtlety of enjoyment increasing the malign persistence of his stare.

“I am unhappy,” said Eve.

“It is because we have done wrong,” said Adam.

“Let us go out into the desert. I do not like this place. The water is not good ; the

air is heavy ; it is a morass ; the home of frogs and the abode of scorpions. At night I lie awake, looking through the door of our cabin, and I see the moonlight lying upon the water, and I hear a chorus of frogs ; all night I hear the croaking of the frogs. It will make me mad."

"Last night you crept into my arms and slept like a child," said Adam. "You did not stir all night ; but I lay awake looking at the moonlight and listening to the frogs. They chanted a spell to fill my soul with terror, and the moon also was full of evil. Then the whole earth dissolved like a dream, and the stars vanished as things that slip through water ; and I seemed to be falling, falling through an endless sea of moonlight, falling towards the moon, and beyond the moon there was nothing ; but I felt you in mine arms, and I did not dare to move, lest you, too, should vanish with the world. This vision was sent to me by God that I might learn how unsubstantial is the world, as if it were but the shadow of His thought, a dream within a dream."

"Do not let us talk of it," said Eve, trembling. "Perhaps if I had not been here you would have fallen into nothing. It was

because you held me that you did not fall. This place will make me mad. Why are the leaves falling from the trees ? ”

“ I do not know.”

“ The palm-trees in the desert do not lose their leaves. My heart is sick for the palm-trees in the desert with the little slender moon shining above them, and shining at the bottom of the deep wells. My heart is sick for the song of the nightingales. Why have the tops of the mountains turned white ? ”

“ I do not know,” answered Adam ; “ but once I saw from the desert a range of mountains, and their tops were white. They also had trees ; but the leaves of the trees did not fall. These trees must be dead. Some great unhappiness is come upon the world. Last night I was cold.”

“ The sand of the desert is always warm,” said Eve.

“ O Eve, I am unhappy,” said Adam, after a silence ; “ I do not know what has come upon the world. Last night when you crept into mine arms I was troubled ; never before have I been troubled while you were with me ; but last night, when you touched me, I trembled. I was unhappy, and I did not know why I was unhappy ; but I feared to

lose you, Eve. Though I touched you it seemed that you were far away. You were but a child when I first saw you with your mother; and I was twelve years old. It was last moon that we came together again; in the day that the djinns came down from the mountains and slew our kinsfolk. I was pasturing the sheep, and as I came back, leading my flock with my pipe, I saw the dying embers and the dead bodies. Then you called to me, and we fled together. Do you remember? That night we slept in the desert. I did not tremble when you touched me. You will never leave me, Eve? We are alone in the world. There are only ourselves, and the angels and the djinns."

"The djinn who came to us yesterday has made us unhappy," said Eve. "He has withered the trees and made the tops of the mountains white."

"He was not a djinn," said Adam; "he was an angel. He smelt of roses, his raiment was wonderful, he was clothed in glory."

"What is that noise?" said Eve. "What is that pillar of cloud that goeth up out of the earth?"

And they saw in the distance the army of Merodach, and, being afraid, they fled.

“It is a pleasant site,” said Merodach, as the elephants entered the valley; “the autumnal landscapes have always a certain melancholy which charms me.”

“The fallen leaves in the valleys are like fallen light,” said Mekerah; “that slender birch flamed yellow a moment ago, but, at a touch, went out in a shower of sparks.”

“It must be delightfully cool in summer,” said the Queen Parysatis.

“The best time is the spring,” said the Princess Candace.

“The almond and cherry blossom will be out then,” said Mekerah; “these slopes will be all pink and white, with petals drifting in the wind. The hyacinths and daffodils will be out then; and the red flower of Tammuz will fall upon the river.”

“I should like to come here in the spring, and go naked, and live in a cabin of boughs like Adam,” said the Princess Candace.

Adam could not be found. Merodach ordered that his men should encircle the whole valley, and drive whatever game there was toward him.

“In this way, if he is still here we shall find him; and in any case we shall have some sport.”

Then the servants of Merodach drove all the game that was in Eden past the elephant of the Great King ; and Merodach pierced the beasts and the birds with his arrows, and the herds of Adam were scattered in the wilderness, bleating dispersedly, and the hollow caves answered their bleating, while the ewes sought their lambs, and the she-goats the kids of the flock. But Adam, the servants of Merodach could not find. Then the slaves erected a pavilion of purple silk, upon which was embroidered the whole story of Ut-Napishtim and the flood ; the gods cowering like dogs at the fury of Rimmon, while Ishtar cried like a woman in travail, and the Anunnaki brought lightnings ; and the race of man strewn like leaves upon the waters ; and the waters like a great host rioting in the fury of battle, white-plumed squadrons of angry and tumultuous waves. Yea, and therein was figured Ut-Napishtim looking from the window of the ark ; and the sending forth of the birds, the sending of the dove, the sending of the swallow, and the sending of the raven, who saw the decrease of the waters, and ate, and waded, and croaked, and turned not back. And there was embroidered upon it the bow which

Ishtar hung in the heavens, and the sacrifice which Ut-Napishtim offered unto the gods upon the mountain, setting Adagur vases seven by seven, strewing reeds, cedar-wood, and incense before them, so that the gods smelt the goodly savour, and gathered like flies over the sacrifice. The Princess Candace was delighted with the tapestry, which she had never seen before. Mekerah told her the story, handling the details with rare imagination, while the Princess ate larks stuffed with cherries. Then she turned toward Bagoas.

“Priest of Bel,” she said, “how long is it since all this trouble came upon the world?”

And Bagaos smiled faintly, his smile expressive of many things.

“It happened, little Princess, in the time when the animals spoke with the tongues of men.”

But the Princess found this chronology too vague.

“When did the animals speak the language of men?” she enquired.

“It is all a tale, little Princess. The animals never spoke as men do; but once upon a time the speech of men was like that of animals.”

“Then it never happened?” enquired the Princess regretfully.

“No; it never happened,” answered Bagoas.

But the King was outraged, for he claimed to be descended from Ut-Napishtim.

“Candace,” he said, “the story is quite true. Gilgamesh builded a ship and pitched it within and without, and he took with him Ia-bani, and some chosen comrades, and journeyed over the waters which engirdle the earth, and he crossed the river of death, which flows round these waters without mixing with them, and he landed in the country of the shades. Then he dug a trench, and cut the throat of a black bull so that the blood flowed into the trench, and the shades flocked to drink of the warm blood; but Gilgamesh drove them from it with his sword until Ut-Napishtim came to drink of it, and had drank his fill. And of all these who came to drink of it only Ut-Napishtim and his wife had life and substance; but all the others were unsubstantial shades. Then Ut-Napishtim told Gilgamesh all the things which had befallen him in this life, and how that the gods had given him and his wife, alone of all human kind, imperishable bodies and immortal youth; but he said it was sad to dwell among the shades, whom he could

not touch with his hands, and to see loved faces, which, whenever the wind blew, lost their remembered contours, and became as wreaths of vapour drifting over the desolate marshes. And he bade Gilgamesh to make haste and get him into his ship again, for that if night found him there, he would become even as the shades himself, and his bones would rot by the bitter flood. Then Gilgamesh made haste into his ship with his companions, and they lifted the creaking sail, and bent to the oars, and departed over the sea. But Ut-Napishtim stood upon the beach where the waves broke at his feet, and his eyes strained after the vessel; for he was like an exile there, who sees a ship bound to his own country, and his heart goes with it. So the body of Ut-Napishtim stood upon the beach, but his heart was with the living offspring of his race; for a long time he stood thus, until the ship was a mere speck on the waters, while tears blinded his eyes; then he sighed and went back into the shadowy ways of that twilit land."

His audience listened to Merodach with astonishment, his voice was full of emotion. He had hurried through the story, careless of whither it led him, like a man blind with grief,

who stumbles against all the obstacles in his path. When he had finished there was silence.

“And Gilgamesh,” he added after a pause, “wrote all these things in a book, which is preserved in the Temple of Bel at Nippur.”

He glanced at Bagoas indignantly as he spoke. Bagoas was eating a dish of leverets stewed with rice and prunes; he looked up from his plate, and wiped his mouth with a fine napkin.

“There is preserved in our Temple at Nippur a book which purports to be the work of Gilgamesh,” he said. “It is the work of a poet, such a history as Mekerah might invent for you, which it would be ridiculous to consider as a true and serious narrative of actual events.”

Mekerah caught a malicious glance from the Queen Parysatis, and rose angrily.

“There is, O Priest, a higher truth and a higher seriousness,” he said. “In the epic of Gilgamesh is enshrined the religious consciousness of Babylonia. It is sacred. It is not to be touched. It contains those great truths which are not a peculiar feature of any one age, but are true for all time. It was directly inspired by Bel, and shall we set our

pitiful human wisdom above the wisdom of the divine word?"

Bagoas once again wiped his mouth before he began to speak.

"I deny," he said, "that it has any truth as an historical document. It is valuable, historically, as an instance of the narrow limits of human knowledge in the age which produced it. That is all its value to the historian. Its value to the theologian is different. He finds in it the first concrete expression of man's relation to God, as he understands it. The truth may be veiled in a mist of fable and metaphor, but he feels it to be there. At the same time, he gives it an extended sense, and interprets it in a larger spirit than that in which it was originally interpreted. It means to us at once something more and something less than it did to the ancient world; for religion is not a definite revelation of an eternal truth, but the contemplation of the unknown from the sum of man's experience. It is consequently susceptible of infinite development and extension, it reacts to every new discovery of science; and its chief glory is that it is part of man's daily life.

"We, the priests of Bel, recognise our sacred

books as the starting-point of a living, growing truth ; in our hands is the duty of interpreting it, and our interpretation is of the nature of a commentary. We are continually rejecting some details as unsound, and developing others to the utmost limits of their power ; that is our value and duty as an hierarchy : to criticise, to prune, to graft. And if we consider the nature of the books, in which are enshrined those great spiritual truths, we see how necessary this work of selection and rejection is ; for they do not form one inseparable, concrete whole, but each has arisen under the impulse of different circumstances, each had its own separate development and origin before it became joined on to the main body.

“ Before philosophy came into being men spoke in fables, and their minds, not being able to grasp as yet the significance of abstract ideas, dealt exclusively with things and actions. They were curious of the destiny of man after death, and they felt the need for some answer, so they imagined the hero, the Babylonian semi - divinity, Gilgamesh, setting out on a ship fashioned by human hands to bring them back the answer which they needed. For us it was the first voyage of man’s mind into the unknown, the first adventure beyond the

realm of actualities, and as such it demands our reverence. We do not, however, believe either in Gilgamesh, Ia-bani, or the ship which crossed the river of death. The story is a mere fable, and the actions described in it are only the unconscious vehicles of a half-recognised truth, or rather of the germ of a new spirit. There is only one form of truth, and one form of seriousness."

He drank a little wine.

"Let us walk in the garden," said Merodach.

Merodach, after a moment's consideration, found that the conclusions of Bagoas with reference to the epic of Gilgamesh were reasonable, so he conversed with the High-priest amiably as they walked by the river. The Princess Candace interrupted the conversation.

"Yesterday was my birthday, and you have given me no present, now let me ask one," she said.

"Ask then," said Merodach, smiling.

"Give me this garden to be my garden, and build me a palace where Adam had his cabin of boughs; a little palace of blue porcelain, which I may visit in the spring, and in the hot months of the year, and set at all

the entrances into the valley great winged cherubim, that the wandering tribes may see that it is a royal palace, and fear to enter."

"So be it," said the King; and the Princess went off to inspect the site of the new palace.

"She is discreet, and charming, wise beyond her years," said Merodach. "We shall consider the son of Na'amah, my cousin, at Nippur. How is he called?"

"His name is Adamaharon," answered Bagoas, smiling; "and he is even now on his way to visit me at Uruk, where he has never been. He may turn aside to hunt. It is his ambition at present to kill a lion, for which he has a permit from the King's huntsman."

"He shall hunt with me," said the King; "but the Princess is still a little young for marriage."

She, unconscious of her fate, drew close to the cabin of Adam. That part of the valley had been deserted by the King's servants, and she was alone. She saw the glitter of a spear which lay in the doorway, and then the eyes of a young man watching her.

"I came for an apple," she said, turning toward the tree in the branches of which the great snake hung; "but Adam must have eaten them all."

“There is one at the top of the tree,” said the boy. “Look! right at the top.”

“It is too high. Perhaps you could knock it down with your spear?”

“That would bruise it. I shall climb up and get it for you.”

He swung himself up, avoiding the great snake which looked at him warily.

“Do not go any higher,” cried the Princess; “the branch will break, and you will be killed.”

But he laughed at her, and climbing higher seized the apple, then the branch did break. She screamed a little.

“You are bruised instead of the apple,” she said, as he picked himself up.

He laughed.

“I have done wonderful things to-day,” he said. “At dawn I killed a lion; and at eve I got an apple for a Princess.”

“But are you not one of the court-pages? I thought you were. Who are you to kill lions, which are preserved for the King?”

“I am Adamaharon, the son of Na’amah, the cousin of the King.”

She offered him the apple, and he bit a large piece out of it.

“Come and look at the lion’s skin,” he said, and led her into Adam’s cabin. She felt a

curious pleasure in being with him, and listened with delight to the story of how he killed the lion. But they did not talk much, they seemed to understand each other so well that they had nothing to say ; and at last they kissed each other.

It was at that precise moment, when their souls seemed to meet with their lips that Merodach entered. For a moment he paused, anger falling about him like darkness in which all things writhed, confused. Then he drew his sword. The Princess Candace fell before him and embraced his knees ; he was lifting the sword to strike her when Bagoas seized his arm.

“ It is the son of Na’amah,” he said quickly.

The King paused, and then lowered his sword slowly. He stared at the young man in silence, and the young man met his gaze quietly. Then the King let his eyes wander over the other’s form, and he saw that the young man was well-thewed, spare, and muscular, with a beauty to make him desired of the maidens ; and his heart softened toward his cousin’s son.

“ You are Adamaharon,” he said slowly, as he sheathed his sword. “ I had intended to send for you to come unto Uruk, that I

might wed you to my daughter. This is the will of the gods, and it is mine, also."

The young man came to him, and bowed down before, touching his feet ; and Merodach let his hand rest upon the bowed head, caressing the thick curls.

"A young lion of our race," said Merodach exultingly ; "look at the yellow mane rippling over the firm neck. A child of my cousin Na'amah. A child of the race of the gods."

And he embraced Adamaharon kindly, and he raised up Candace and kissed her fondly, bidding her go to her mother, and tell her how she had found a husband in the cabin of Adam. And Candace left them ; and as she went she wept, for her fear had given place to joy. Then Adamaharon rose up, and stood before the King.

"I have done wonderful things to-day," he said proudly. "At dawn I slew a lion ; and at eve I kissed the desire of my heart. My mouth is filled with honey."

"It is the will of the gods," said Merodach.

Then he began to lead the son of Na'amah toward the river where the Queen Parysatis was listening to her daughter's tale ; but Bagoas paused before the apple-tree and looked into the eyes of the great serpent.

“It is the will of the gods,” he said, with his ironical smile. “I am but their minister, the mere instrument of their designs; so what part shall I claim in this adventure?”

The snake watched him fixedly.

“The boy is like a son to me,” said Bagoas. “He was born to be fortunate.”

And then he followed them toward the river, leaving the wise snake wreathed in the branches of the fruitless tree.

On the journey back to Uruk the three royal elephants walked abreast. Adamaharon rode with Merodach, Bagoas with the Princess Candace, and the Queen Parysatis with her attendant poet. And Adamaharon made delicate songs for his beloved.

“The old look upon the stars,” he sang; “but I look into the eyes of my beloved. What stars are like her eyes? What wisdom can compare with the wisdom of love?”

“He is a true poet,” said Parysatis to Mekerah. “What spirit, what fire!”

“I have said the same thing an hundred times,” said Mekerah crossly.

“Precisely,” said Parysatis; “he has said it once, perfectly.”

“The kisses of her mouth are sweeter than honey,” sang Adamaharon; “more fragrant

than apples. She has filled me with the joy of morning, and gladdened my soul as with wine."

Bagoas leaned toward the Queen's elephant.

"Adam said of love that——"

But the Queen put a finger on her lips.

"I do not believe that Adam ever existed," she said.

Bagoas, looking at Candace, smiled.

But many years afterwards a woman sitting by the door of a hut in the desert, watching the quiet stars quicken as the day died, drew two young boys toward her, and told them the story of the garden. Her face was tranquil, like the face of one who has grief for a companion; and the boys were clothed in goat-skins.

"And," she said, looking into the embers of the fire, "the man counselled me to eat, saying, if ye eat of the fruit ye shall know."

Adam suddenly appeared in the firelight. He had heard the last words.

"It was the serpent," he said suspiciously.

"You always told me it was the serpent."

And Eve answered quickly, drawing her children closer to her.

"Yea, it was the serpent! I forgot. It was the serpent!"

To MRS SHAKESPEARE

II

AT THE HOUSE OF EURIPIDES

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EURIPIDES ordered the tables to be removed, and then some musicians entered, followed by a girl, who danced as Persephone among the flowers of Enna. While the guests were admiring the grace of her gestures, and the swift movements of her thin, naked feet, Callias came in with Lysis and Antisthenes. They had been unable to come earlier; and after making their excuses to Euripides, Callias and Antisthenes took a couch close by Protagoras, and Lysis went to Socrates. The company included Glaucon, Hermogenes, Pythodorus, Philip the buffoon, who never missed a feast, and Apollodorus, the friend of Socrates. Protagoras had a couch to himself on the right of Euripides, who was also without a companion. Others came in during the evening until the room was very full,

When the girl had finished her dance there was a murmur of admiration, and she leaned back on the bench, smiling with pleasure, her slim body trembling and palpitating beneath its crocus-coloured veils.

“ You are magnificent, Euripides,” said Socrates. “ You not only feast us sumptuously; but you amuse us with dancing and music.”

“ I am glad that you are amused, Socrates. Why are you so silent to-night ? ”

“ I feel like one about to be initiated into the mysteries. When there are so many older and wiser men than myself present I listen rather than talk. It is more interesting. I wish that I had come with flowers and ribbons like Lysis, so that I might have occupied myself in making a garland. Are you going to crown Protagoras when he has read his discourse, Lysis ? ”

“ Yes, Socrates ; Callias said it would be worthy of a crown.”

“ Protagoras must be the happiest of men,” said Socrates. “ He has health, riches, and honour from all. I am impatient to hear what he has to say.”

“ I am old,” said Protagoras, “ and like to rest a little while after eating ; but I shall

not keep you long. In the meantime, why do you not have a discussion with Euripides?"

"Well, as you have given me leave to speak, I should like to ask Euripides a few questions."

"Very well," said Euripides.

"Do not encourage him," shouted Philip. "If he once begins asking questions we shall not know where we are. He will tell us that Protagoras is not Protagoras, and that this banquet is not a banquet."

"Why do you attack me like this, Philip? What harm have I ever done to you?" said Socrates.

"Why, ever since you have taken to frequenting the tables of the rich you have done me harm," said Philip, with a pretence to excitement. "At one time I was always a welcome guest; but since you have come upon the scene no one laughs at me. Your talk is all about justice, wisdom, and virtue. What does a poor man like myself know of such things? But these are all that amuse the company now; and, if I want a dinner in mine old age, I shall have to play the sophist too."

Philip was a great favourite with the

company, and his exaggerated gestures as he railed at Socrates amused them extremely. He advanced into the middle of the room.

“Laugh at me as you will,” he cried; “it is true. Socrates cannot deny it. The more wine a man has now, the more solemn he looks; until sometimes I think I have strayed to a funeral instead of to a feast. If I chose, I could be the greatest sophist of you all. I should teach you not only the knowledge of good, and truth, and virtue, but the knowledge of all things.”

“And how would you teach us, Philip?” said Socrates; “for this is precisely the knowledge which I have been seeking all my life. By the dog of Egypt, if you would teach me this I should ever afterwards obey you in all things. I have always had the greatest respect for you, Philip, but I did not think that philosophy was among your accomplishments.”

“Do you answer me, Socrates? and I shall prove it to you.”

“Willingly,” said Socrates; “but I am afraid you are going to make me ridiculous. I have never pretended to be a sophist, nor, indeed, to know anything.”

Philip stood in the middle of the room, and

the company all leant forward, looking at him with amusement.

“ Is knowledge the knowledge of something, or the knowledge of nothing ? ” he enquired of Socrates.

“ Of both,” answered Socrates.

“ You will not escape me that way,” exclaimed Philip. “ Would you not rather say it is the knowledge of something, and the knowledge of not knowing other things ? ”

“ Very well, Philip.”

“ Then there is a knowledge of knowing, and a knowledge of not knowing ; and we know the things we know, and the things we do not know ? ”

“ That seems absurd,” said Socrates.

“ What ? Will you go back on the argument, Socrates, and say that knowledge is only the knowledge of something ? ”

“ Let us try that way then,” Socrates said.

“ By Zeus, Socrates, that way will do as well as another,” said Philip ; “ for if you know something you can distinguish it from other things, can you not ? ”

“ Yes.”

“ You can distinguish one thing you know, from another thing you know ; and both from what you do not know.”

“ You have made me giddy, Philip. Let me think.”

“ Well, Socrates, you can distinguish Euripides from Protagoras, can you not? And you can distinguish both these people whom you know, from the tyrant Archelaus, whom you do not know? ”

“ Certainly; I must agree to that.”

“ Then you can distinguish between something you know and something you do not know? ”

“ Yes.”

“ Consider a moment, Socrates. Is it possible for you to know the difference between one thing and another unless you know both things? ”

“ Why, no! I must admit that,” said Socrates.

“ Then mark where I lead you; for if you know the things you know, you must also know the things you do not know.”

Every one was now laughing immoderately; not only at Philip’s dialectic, but at his pompous gestures, wherewith he mimicked many well-known sophists; blowing out his cheeks, pursing his lips, tapping his head suspiciously, and rubbing his nose.

“By the dog of Egypt!” cried Socrates; “the man has been with Euthydemus.”

“Euthydemus is a child to me,” said Philip contemptuously.

“But, Philip, if I confess I know nothing?” said Socrates, when the laughter failed a little.

“Why, then, Socrates, I shall not argue the question with you; though I could easily prove to you that if you knew nothing you would know everything.”

“Philip, I have always asserted my ignorance. It is my ignorance which causes me to ask questions. And now, as you have proved that you know everything, I want to ask you what knowledge is. Can you tell me?”

“This talking has made me thirsty, Socrates, and I am going to seek for truth in the wine, where the proverb says it may be found. I shall talk no more.”

“Well, then, I shall ask my question of Euripides, if you will allow me.”

“Ask, by all means!” said Philip; “but if your questions are to be about knowledge and virtue I shall go and sit with the flute-girls, and we shall talk of something that we can understand.”

Socrates settled himself more comfortably upon the couch, and, taking up one of the

ribbons which Lysis had brought, turned it about his fingers.

“ Protagoras is going to tell us whether we can have any knowledge of the gods or not,” he said ; “ but let us enquire into their nature, assuming that we know them, for the present. Shall we examine your own conception of God, Euripides ? It will clear matters up if we are able to say what the gods whom we seek to know are like.”

“ Very well, Socrates,” said Euripides.

“ You live at the centre of things, Euripides,” said Socrates ; “ and every aspect of our modern thought is clearly reflected in your work. This is one reason why I have always been an admirer of your plays ; but it has its drawbacks, for sometimes you reflect two distinct and opposed theories, so that your meaning is not quite clear. Your treatment of the myths is, in reality, a criticism of the myths, is it not ? ”

“ Yes.”

“ The dramatist takes a myth as his material, and by working upon it, criticising it, rejecting some features, and developing others, he will make it into a play, and not only does he deal with the myth itself in this way, but he also examines and criticises each character in it,

using the same method, so that his play is not only a representation of the myths but a criticism of them as well. Now I have lately been reading your *Hippolytus* again, so that we shall take that as an example. The myth is very simple: Aphrodite wishes to be avenged upon Hippolytus, who neglects her worship in preference for the worship of Artemis; and in order to compass the death of the young man she stirs up an unholy passion in Phædra. Hippolytus refuses the love of Phædra, and, in despair, she kills herself, leaving a writing behind which accuses Hippolytus of having forced her. Theseus, discovering this writing, calls down upon Hippolytus one of the three curses which Poseidon has promised him to fulfil, and Hippolytus is slain. Then Artemis reveals the truth to Theseus, and before Hippolytus dies Theseus is forgiven by him.

“ This story is full of improbable and supernatural conditions, the jealousy of Aphrodite, the apparition of Artemis, and the intervention of Poseidon. We no longer imagine the gods as beings with the same passions as men; but the passions and strife of the gods are the essential feature of some myths. Do you think, Euripides, that the makers of myths in

the old days simply dragged in the gods, in order to explain any tragedy which was quite inexplicable in itself, and that they attempted to alleviate in this way the sense of waste with which a tragedy fills us?"

"It seems a plausible supposition, Socrates. If men cannot relate an event to any known cause, they consider it sufficiently explained if it be attributed to a deity."

"And so it happens," said Socrates, "that many evil deeds are attributed to the gods; the death of Hippolytus, for instance, to the jealousy of Aphrodite. Do you think, Euripides, that the makers of myths and the common people believe that evil is not inherent in the action itself, but depends upon the quality and nature of the agent?"

"Yes," answered Euripides; "they imagine that actions are permissible in gods which would not be permissible in man; that the gods have a right to do evil, since they have the power. On the contrary, I maintain, that a god is all goodness, and that if he revenged himself on man, or were guilty of jealousy and hatred, he would cease, by that fact, to be a god."

"And is it because you hold this opinion

that you make the action in your play of Hippolytus, as far as possible, move independently of the gods ? ”

“ How do you mean, Socrates ? ”

“ I mean, Euripides, that your play seems to present two sides : the action as it is presented in the original myth, and the action which is the result of your criticism. There are some people who say that if you are not content with the myths, you should invent your own stories ; but this would defeat your object which is purely critical, and which aims at presenting another version of the story. You seem to say to yourself : the myth presents the gods as beings with the same appetites, passions, and desires as mortals, and so I shall treat them. They are to you mere characters in the play, and even subordinate characters at that. You introduce Aphrodite to speak the prologue, and thus, ostensibly following the myth, make her responsible for the catastrophe. But at the same time you show that the catastrophe is directly precipitated by the hastiness of Theseus ; a fatal flaw which he himself recognises, and laments when it is too late. He was over-hasty to use the gift of Poseidon, he says ; but Hippolytus answers that if he

had not used that method of revenge, he would have found another. Theseus implicitly agrees to this, when he says that some lying spirit had blinded him to the truth, and thus the guilt is flung back upon Aphrodite, whom Artemis promises to punish by slaying Adonis. In reality, Euripides, the lying spirit is not Aphrodite, but Phædra; and you take care that Artemis should point this out. Thus, at every part of the myth where the action of the divinities is supposed to be clearly visible, you present us with another version and another cause; and, by this means, not only do you make the development of the plot more plausible, and fill us with admiration for your genius, but ultimately you remove the responsibility from the gods, by showing that the action of the play is not dependent upon them. Aphrodite seems to be only the incarnation of Phædra's desire, and Poseidon of a father's curse. Artemis, it is true, has a separate existence, and is not merely the personification of a mortal passion; she exists in order that she may reveal the truth to Theseus, and for that purpose, had you not been bound by tradition, the nurse would have done as well. You say, too, in one of the choruses that the thought of the

gods consoles your grief, and that your hope clings to the belief in a supreme reason ; but that when you consider the deeds and the fate of men you are confounded. Do you think, Euripides, that the whole evil of life comes from man alone, and that the gods are not implicated in it ? ”

Protagoras smiled. Euripides leaned forward, looking at Socrates with bright eyes from beneath his bent brows.

“ The words of the chorus, Socrates, mean that when I consider the wretchedness and the doom of men, I doubt the existence of a supreme reason, or at least waver in my belief.”

“ Of course I see that,” answered Socrates ; “ but if you accept the idea of a universal mind animating all things, why should the misery and wretched conditions of the life of men dissipate this idea ? Your play shows that it is man’s own folly, and not the anger of the gods, that punishes him with misfortune. Theseus in ignorance calls down the doom of death upon Hippolytus, and thus brings evil upon himself. It is the lust of Phædra, and the blind anger of Theseus, which are responsible for the death of the innocent ; but is it better to have suffered unjustly as Hippolytus

suffered, or to die in shame, despised, as Phædra died, or to live as Theseus lived in misery, though forgiven?"

"I agree to what you have said of my play," answered Euripides, his worn, melancholy face illuminated with a smile; "and I agree, also, that it was my purpose to deny that the gods do evil, and to make people dissatisfied with the myths. I misunderstood the reason for your use of what the chorus says about the Supreme Mind; the doings of men seem to me to be more the result of the conditions of life than of their own wickedness. If men err it is through ignorance; but they suffer quite independently of their deserts. It is through my sympathy with mankind that I am led into doubt. Man struggles all his life with the fluctuations and vicissitudes of fortune; his pleasures are but phantoms and visions which elude his grasp; the one certainty before him is death: an unknown terror. Why has he been set among this play of circumstance, over which he has no control, but which whirls him away like a dead leaf upon the ripples and eddies of a river? The best happiness we can find in life is resignation, a folding of the hands, a withdrawal into the interior peace of our own minds, the serene heights which the Muses

inhabit. Those who have gained that sanctuary have at least the happiness which comes from a knowledge of the limitations of life; they have learned to desire little, to delight in natural and simple things, the bright air, the coolness of forests, wind rippling the waves of corn and setting the poplar leaves a-tremble; but, alas! behind even this serenity of mind is the shadow of human suffering. So few are the wise, and so many the miserable! We would not, if we could, cut ourselves off from the dumb herd of humanity, with its obscure sufferings, its vague desires, its inarticulate and eternal pain."

"I should not ask it of you, Euripides," said Socrates gently.

He had a real love for Euripides, a real admiration for the mind which through its own tumult and discord had come at last into the possession of peace, and to the vision of a clear hope.

"If mankind with its blind follies makes me doubt the existence of a God," continued Euripides, "its miseries make me believe in one. I am not an enemy of knowledge; I have sought it with diligence all the days of my life; but we have other needs. We suffer with one another; there is a trouble

and perplexity in the world from which we cannot escape, and to which we cannot refuse sympathy, pity, and love. Religion does not take into sufficient account the fact, that however diverse are the activities of men, all suffer alike. We have the corporate religious unity of the State, and it presents to us the noble and lofty ideas of the Olympian deities. Do you remember, Socrates, the fable which Protagoras made for you, describing how at first men had only the arts, and warred among themselves until Zeus sent them the gifts of justice and reverence ? ”

“ Yes ; I remember it. I cannot, of course, remember all that Protagoras said,” answered Socrates. “ Long speeches puzzle me. But I remember that it was beautiful.”

“ It was at my house,” said Callias, with some pride.

“ Well, Socrates, it seems to me that justice and reverence were not enough. Man needed something more. So the worship of Demeter and Dionysos was revealed to him. I have sometimes meditated writing a play about Dionysos, the enthusiasm of wine, of poetry, the Deliverer, who uplifts the heart of man ; or about Demeter, the Earth, the herbage and the ripe corn, through whom we are kin, not

only with each other but with the beasts of the field, the cattle grazing in their fat pasture, and the young fawn couched among the briars and thickets of the forest. These divinities seem closer to us than the ruler of the sun or the lord of the sea. They move gently among us, coming and going with the seasons, filling our granaries and wine-jars with their mystical gifts; corn and wine, their very bodies and blood, through which we enter into a close and intimate communion with them, and become indeed their children, or even themselves, as when their spirit possesses us entirely, and with a wild enthusiasm we range through the wooded hills, clothed in spotted fawn-skins, crowned with dark ivy, shaking the thyrsus in the air, and leaping to the sound of timbrels and pipes, and the brazen cymbals of the Great Mother.

“ The Olympian divinities have given to man the knowledge of the arts, and instilled into him the principles of justice and of reverence; but they are untouched by the sense of our human mortality.

“ Of old, the poets say, they visited mortals; and coming to a house at dusk in the guise of huntsmen or travellers would rest that night to share the evening meal, and at dawn

depart again, leaving behind them strange gifts. Now they come among us no more. But these divinities of our own delightful earth, how different they are! Our mortality, our labours, and our desires are part of their ritual. They have shown man that he is one with that earth from which he derives his being, and which receives him again, after the toils and vicissitudes of life, as with the gentle enfolding arms of a mother; and that through it he is one also with them. They give him, in the recurrence of seed-time and harvest, the symbolism of the vine and the vintage, the return of Spring, coming with frail, delicate flowers, and troops of swallows, in the first flush of green over the plough-lands, hints and foreshadowings of some such resurrection for himself; until death ceases to be a nameless terror to him, but is like a little interval of sleep not entirely barren of dreams. How natural they are too!

“ We should not be surprised if we met with Demeter, clad in blue raiment, in a corn-field, as the dawn was breaking. It would not seem strange to see her, plucking the golden ears, and weaving them into a garland for her head; or resting beside a well of bright water, and looking over the misty fields with

quiet, thoughtful eyes. It would not seem strange if Dionysos appeared suddenly to us, coming through the shadowy woods between the straight stems of the pines, light in his eyes, and the wind lifting the hair from his cool brow ; or to meet him leading his troop of delirious worshippers by the banks of Asopus, or up the steep glens of Cithaeron. If she, Earth, be a mother to us, he is like an elder brother, born of a mortal woman, and so closer to us. It is true, Socrates, that the myths dealing with him contain much that is revolting, and are full of tragic and sinister episodes ; but behind the veil of man's weaving is a figure of singular beauty, wild but gentle ; a divinity who promises to the restless and troubled spirit of man joy in life and peace after death."

His words made an impression upon the company. There was silence for the moment.

" Well, Euripides, I shall not question you any further to-night," said Socrates. " We have agreed that the idea of divinity is exclusive of all evil ; and now Protagoras will probably tell us that the philosophic question of the present time is not whether the gods are good or evil, but whether they exist at all."

Protagoras made no further delay. He had a roll of parchment in his hand, but scarcely referred to it. There was a movement among the guests as he began, for all were curious to hear what he had to say.

“ We cannot know whether the gods exist or do not exist ; the matter is too obscure, and man’s life too short. If they exist, it must be in some manner peculiar to themselves, for we cannot find any trace of their presence in the world. They are not present to us as objects to be perceived by the senses ; if they move among us at all it is by stealth, and without leaving so much trace as a ship leaves upon the waves. But man has always believed that they are close to him, and has come to imagine them as haunting every green corner of the earth, each well, and wood, and hill, the blue depths of the sea and the wide regions of the air. We have a God to preside at our sowing and at our harvest, at our setting-forth and at our home-coming ; there are gods of flocks and herds, of vineyards and olive groves, of rivers and of the sea. Poetry has peopled the air with them, and given to Aphrodite a team of sparrows, and to Hera a team of peacocks, and to grey-eyed Athene an owl.

Indeed, it is strange, so familiar and frequent are they in our thoughts, that we should ever question their existence ; yet the moment we seek for any tangible evidence of their presence in the world we are at fault, and the more we consider them the more shadowy and elusive they become. The whole notion of divinity is constantly changing in our minds, adapting itself to new conditions of life, varying its form as our knowledge becomes deeper ; but always becoming more spiritual, less tangible, until it seems to be nothing but that wandering breath which quickens all things into life.

“ At first we imagined the gods as the incarnation of some natural force, like Aphrodite, the foam-born, whom all living creatures obey ; or Demeter, the Earth-mother, who produces all the fruits and harvests, and the grass and flowers of the field. Stripped of the mystery and beauty with which the poets have clothed them, these are but the conditions of man’s life, his begetting and sustenance ; we must seek behind them for that idea of the supreme reason, who is not only the cause but the end of all things, not only the source of existence but the principle from which spring our notions of truth, of wisdom, of justice, and all those ideals which reconcile us to life and

bid us hope in the ultimate realisation of the good. It is not sufficient for us to find a cause from which existence is derived, for even if that were laid bare to us we could not find in it our ultimate satisfaction, unless it conformed to the idea of divinity, which, as Socrates and Euripides have agreed, is exclusive of all elements of evil. Is it possible to have this knowledge? There are two insuperable difficulties.

“ The first is in the nature of man’s knowledge, which is not constant or common, but variable and peculiar to each individual. Each man is the measure of all things. To him, things are what they seem; truth, what he thinks true; justice, what he thinks just; good, what he thinks good. Coldness or heat, light or darkness, colour, sound, smell, touch, taste, are all equally matters of opinion. There is no truth external to the individual. The second difficulty is that even if all men had a fixed and common standard of truth, we can find no evidence of the action of any divinity in the world, no evidence of a supreme reason dominating all things. The world seems to obey certain blind and unreasonable laws; but the life of man, the life of all things, outside the mere routine of tides and seasons, seems

to be subject only to chance : and whether we live or die, our fate is the result of an accident. We are merely the idle foam upon the surface of the waves of being ; an accident, and not the reason of the waves. Perhaps the whole reason of life is unconcerned with us ; having a different aim to what we imagine, we ourselves being only the dust of a sculptor's workshop, the superfluous marble which he chips off from the hidden image of his desire.

“ It is certain, that if there be a God he is careless of the fate of man. For, if there were a God, since he must be just and good, we should find the prayers of the good man answered, and evil would be punished in the world. As it is the evil men prosper, and the good gain no reward ; evil and good, what are they but our points of view ? It is for this reason that we doubt the existence of any but a mechanical cause for the universe ; because we have had no experience of good triumphing in the external world. Diagoras of Melos, being taken into the Temple of Poseidon and shown the offerings dedicated there as memorials of answered prayers and in fulfilment of vows, looked at them with tears : ‘ They reckon those who were saved,’ he said ; ‘ they forget those who perished.’

Yes ; one is more touched by the thought of what was not hung in the temple, than by the sight of what was. We think of the smallness of the temple, and of the largeness of the sea.

“ Let us state our position with clearness. We are not concerned with the existence of the gods, but with our knowledge of their existence. It would be equally foolish in us to deny, as to affirm, their existence. There may be a supreme reason acting upon the world, whose ends we cannot understand, whose action we cannot comprehend. It may be that the world exists for some other purpose than for the realisation of our own dreams. Perhaps we are only the superfluities, the parings of ivory, the winnowed husks from the threshing, by-products in the creation of something more perfect ; and perhaps the confused and obscure sense of an ideal, which works in us and is at once our desire and our despair, is a dim consciousness of the growth of this beauty, a desire and a despair of being one with it. But, if we could escape for a moment from the tyranny of our own selves, the illusion of our own momentary existence, we might learn to rejoice in the knowledge, that beauty exists, if not in us, at least somewhere in the world. If that knowledge were ever

present with us, I think that we might be content. Content even to suffer, to realise that everything that ever lived has died for an idea, that all life is a martyrdom ; but, alas ! we have not even this knowledge. Our life is a dream of shadows. Our knowledge is but a focus of wandering ideas, burning a moment in a white heat, ere they pass again, diffused widely, into the unknown.

“ The sense of divinity, which moves in us, may be but a hope born of this trouble and perplexity, a desire that at some future time the fragments of our being shall be collected again and fashioned into a whole. We cry out that we need not be wasted, to drift forever as dust, blind, dumb, and inarticulate, yet with a dim consciousness of a life stirring beyond us and alien to us. Let us share in it. Let us have a share in the world’s sunlight and the sweet air. We have personified this hope, and given it an extended significance which seems to breathe and move in all things. Each individual finds his justification in God ; and it follows that his God must be merciful, just, and good ; but, at the same time, the notions of justice and good are entirely peculiar to the individual. God is thus a realisation of self, a self who triumphs and will be justified,

even through his misery. The very practice of virtue is an accusation against the gods, an affirmation that if the good perish then God is evil.

“I am a maker of myths, one who fashions out of perishable things a thought which, through its informing truth, exists independently of time. I think of man as of one who is blind, dumb, and without hands. Sitting alone in this physical darkness a thought comes to him of what his life might have been if he had been born whole; and he imagines himself as a man with hands, a voice, and sight, creating a whole world out of his pleasure. This other man, who moves like a creature of light through the dim passages of his mind, becomes, as it were another self; but through his greater power, a being of joy living eternally, a strong, triumphant, beautiful figure; and consequently external from, and different to, the man. And the blind, dumb, handless man, bowing his head in the darkness, says: ‘It is God.’

“For the gods which we have imagined are immortal men, and man a mortal God. They differ from us in nothing but the gladness and eternity of their actions. They move delightfully on the wings of the wind; through the

great tumult of waters their feet are swift and sure ; their voices have a music that is like the fierce motion of dancing, yellow flames. God is simply our own selves, made whole, and removed from the devouring years. God is our weakness searching after strength, our blindness, thirsting after light ; our desire seeking for a voice, and we worship him. We worship him because he is ourselves ; but we seek him, always, as if conscious of our own weakness and worthlessness, beyond ourselves, in the external world. Our God is hidden in the deeps of the sea ; in the shadows of the forests ; in that blue heaven beyond the stars. He is very subtile, moving on stealthy feet, through unknown ways. We seek him, but we find him not. He is swifter than we are, and when we pursue him he flies away into the darkness ; and when we cry out that we have lost him he comes close to us again, filling our hearts with a silent sweetness. So it is ever with us ; when we seek to clasp him he eludes us ; but in the silence of night we imagine that he is not very far away and that a little thing would suffice to allure him to us, to reveal him to sight.

“ Once in a country of hills and valleys lived a shepherd who called to the nymph Echo, and

she answered him from her cave in the hillside with his own voice. Then he girded himself, and taking a staff in his hand set out to seek her ; and coming to the place whence she had answered him, he called again, and she replied from a higher peak. When he had called from the next peak he was answered from the valley and descended into its deep forests ; and men saw him no more, for he died there, and the beasts devoured him.

“ We also die ere we have found the voice which calls to us from the mountains ; but it ever lures us forward, calling sometimes from a cave quite close to us, and again from a distant peak. We also die, and our ears hear it no longer ; but our children will hear and follow it gladly up the steep glens of the windy hills.”

As Protagoras finished, he dropped the roll of parchment beside him, and motioned the slave to bring him some wine. Lysis rose from his couch and attempted to crown him, when the loud voice of Pythodorus broke in upon the general conversation.

“ What is this that you are applauding ? ” he said ; “ are you men of Athens or foreigners fond only of subtile words ? I, for one, shall not praise or consent to what has been said

by Protagoras here to-night. What has he done but cloak his impiety in smooth phrases and suave periods ? Are you willing, through his soft persuasion, to deny that the gods inhabit the wide skies and the hidden regions of the bright sea ? ”

A silence fell upon the company. One or two shifted uneasily upon their couches. It was fairly well known that Pythodorus had some personal grudge against Protagoras ; but no one had suspected that he would take this opportunity of revenge.

“ You are mistaken, Pythodorus,” said Euripides. “ Protagoras has only discussed the question of whether we can have any knowledge of the gods. He carefully disclaimed any intention of denying their existence.”

“ It is clear to me, Euripides, that Protagoras has denied them,” answered Pythodorus. “ He claims that if we do not know a thing, the thing does not exist. But I shall not argue the question here ; I shall lay it before the proper judges. An offence against the gods is a crime in which the whole city is implicated, and which they must cleanse from themselves. I would have you believe that I am not moved by any personal feeling

against Protagoras, but only by a desire that the whole people should not have to expiate, in suffering, the crime of one man. All the misfortunes of Athens have arisen from the spirit of irreverent sophistry which is eating her away; and people now seem to think that they may say anything, provided that it be well said."

He spoke in a raucous voice, trying to contain his passion, but with an exultant fire in his eyes. Socrates sat up on his couch and rubbed his leg.

"Pythodorus, you are as bad a listener as I am. I can never understand these long speeches. They act like a charm, and I always fall asleep in the middle of them; but before I fell asleep to-night I heard what Protagoras said as to his main position, and I think that he was laughing at us. He spoke only in a cautious vein of paradox. While he was pretending one thing, he was proving the opposite. You must not take him very seriously."

"What do you mean?"

"Were you awake all the time, Pythodorus?" said Socrates.

"Of course. I was listening most attentively."

“Then you will remember that Protagoras said that the gods were not to be found in the external world, but in the hearts of men. We cannot know them, as we know a tree, but we can feel them by us. He seems to hold that we cannot know anything except what we have drawn out of ourselves.”

Socrates was attempting to lead the conversation back into quieter channels, but Pythodorus rose.

“I shall leave you. It is not for me to judge whether Protagoras is right or wrong,” he said.

Some of the guests left with him, through fear, and the rest were dismayed. Protagoras, who had not said a word in answer to Pythodorus, leaned back on his couch and spoke.

“Of course, Pythodorus will accuse me,” he said; “and I shall be condemned. He is powerful, and in the present condition of things can do as he likes. But it would be a shame if we allowed the malice of one person to interrupt our discussion. Let us sit talking until dawn, and then I shall prepare to leave Athens. I expected that he would do me what injury he could. Shall we have some more wine, Euripides? It is probably our last feast together.”

“I am afraid it is,” said Euripides. “Yes; let us have some wine. I blame myself for what has happened; but I never expected this.”

“It would have happened to-morrow if not to-day,” answered Protagoras. “Do not blame yourself, Euripides. There are, I think, few persons in this room, who will escape from the reaction which is developing in Athens. Socrates, of course, will survive it. He follows the traditions of religion, but, at the same time, he differs from them. What was that curious paradox you put forward about my teaching, Socrates?”

“It was no paradox, Protagoras, but sober, earnest truth. You will never persuade me that your intention was to deny the existence of the gods.”

“Well, then, let us discuss it. Only our friends are here now. And to-morrow I shall be beyond the reach of malice. Can we know the gods, Socrates?”

“You confuse the two things, because Pythodorus did. Philip has not deserted us. He is sitting there half drunk. Will you argue with him? If with me, answer what I ask. You denied, did you not, that we can find any trace of the action of the gods in this world?”

“Yes.”

“And did you not affirm that the gods exist, if they exist at all, in a manner peculiar to themselves.”

“Yes.”

“Without denying the existence of the gods, then, you affirm that we cannot know them because we cannot find any trace of their action in the life of man ?”

“That is what I said,” answered Protagoras.

“And you also said that, man being the measure of all things, truth is what he thinks true ; good, what he thinks good. There is no truth external to the individual. Did you not ?”

“Yes, Socrates ; but I am afraid you are giving a sense to my words which they were not intended to convey.”

“That is not my object. I wish merely to examine your thought. You incline to cloak it in myths, but you should learn to send truth from you clean and naked, as a trainer sends an athlete into the palaestra. If I offend you, Protagoras, you must forgive me ; but I cannot follow an argument which is not direct. Do your words contain my meaning ?”

“Yes, Socrates.”

“Then you deny all truth except what a man draws out of himself ?”

“Yes.”

“And a man should not say it is cold. He should say I am cold ?”

“Yes ; all external things are only what we imagine them to be.”

“The same, of course, holds good with regard to truth, virtue, and justice ; these things are equally external to the individual. I think that you have said this before, Protagoras, have you not ?”

“Yes,” said Protagoras.

“Well, then, let us leave that part of the argument for the present,” said Socrates. “We shall return to it later, as every one agrees to it. I wish to ask you another series of questions. If you wished to learn the art of making plays, would you go to a cobbler or to Euripides ? To Euripides. Very well ! But if you wished to learn the art of making shoes, would you go to a cobbler, or to a playwright ?”

“To a cobbler, of course !”

“You would choose one skilful rather than a beginner ; and in politics, also, you would choose an experienced man, in preference to one who had no experience, and in art you would take the finest artist as your master. Would you not ?”

“Of course.”

“And the same with pastry-cooks, with tillers of the soil and vine-dressers ; you would choose the person most experienced ?”

“Yes.”

“All this I have learnt from what you said at the beginning of your discourse. If you wished to learn the arts of politics or of cobbling you would go to a politician or to a cobbler ; but if you wished to learn the art of being virtuous, would you go to a vicious or to a virtuous man ?”

“To a virtuous man.”

“But why, Protagoras ? Is not the test of truth in yourself and not in others ?”

“Yes.”

“Then you know the truth, and you recognise it when you meet with it ?”

“Yes.”

“But then the truth lies also outside of ourselves. Goodness, wisdom, and other excellent things are external to us, and we can only draw them out of ourselves ? Have you not said that God is a projection of self ?”

“A stronger self, Socrates.”

“Then you recognise a standard of excellence beyond man, and this standard of excellence he draws out of himself ; and that

only is true which a man draws out of himself ; but at the same time you recognise in others the art of cobbling and of politics."

"These things are only conventional," said Protagoras.

"Why, Protagoras ? What is the difference between going as an apprentice to a good cobbler and going as an apprentice to a good man ?"

"Because cobbling is an art that any one may learn, but virtue is different."

"Is virtue different from doing good ?"

"No."

"A virtuous person will seek the good ; he recognises goodness by his own standard ?"

"Yes."

"He is the measure of truth, and he chooses a teacher who will show him a fitting wisdom, as he will choose a cobbler who will make him a fitting shoe ?"

"Socrates, I frankly admit that I am tired of your cobbler."

"But is virtue doing things well or ill ?"

"Well."

"And the individual judges whether the thing is well or ill done ?"

"You are still cobbling, Socrates."

"Surely, Protagoras, if truth is drawn

entirely out of the individual, he will know virtue better than he will know a shoe. I do not want you to say that I am forcing your words into a construction that they will not bear. Your arguments suggest others to me. I am cobbling, you say, point out the patches ! You say that there is no truth external to the individual ; that if a man feels hot, it is hot ; that justice is what he thinks just, that he cannot know external things. Surely, then, his whole standard of truth is himself. And if he fashion a God out of his inner consciousness, surely God exists more truly than a tree or a shoe exists."

"Socrates, my words may bear this expansion. You hold, then, that we may have knowledge of their existence. I am not averse to this belief ; but to me a God is simply a self, a self freed from our conditions of life.

"Let us not say that Socrates or Protagoras has triumphed. We have simply got a little closer to the truth."

"God may exist for the individual, Socrates ; in the individual consciousness. But the truth lies beyond us. Man's image of a tree is true, because a tree is."

"The colour, the shape, the texture, are not," replied Socrates ; "except as the man

sees them. Philip was right in saying that if we know one thing we know all others. Philip, wake up!"

"Socrates, what mischief are you up to now that Pythodorus is gone," said Philip. "You talk too much. Protagoras said simply that a monkey imagines God as a monkey, while a peacock imagines him as a peacock."

"O Philip, what a fool you are! Does a foolish man imagine a foolish God? Does a blind man imagine a blind God?"

"Of course not."

"Then, listen, Philip!" Does Pythodorus imagine a God who is a nuisance to his friends?"

"No."

"Very well, then, some standard exists which is external to the individual, but which he only knows through his inner consciousness. The oracle at Delphi was right when it said: 'Know thyself. For the more a man knows himself, the more he knows God.'"

"It is dawn," said Lysis.

"O Socrates, you are the most unbridled and insatiable of all the sophists," said Protagoras, laughing. "You have laid a trap for me."

"Why do you accuse me of laying a trap

for you? We are not arguing with the sole desire of scoring a point against each other. I do not lay traps for you, as if I were a hunter of men; but I lay traps for truth, being a hunter of truth, and having no other reason for existence but to chase and follow after it wherever it may be hidden."

"We have no more time, Socrates," said Protagoras. "Tell me your own opinion of the gods and of the aim of life."

"What can I say to you," said Socrates, "beyond what a prophetess taught me? For she said that in our voyage through the world we are being reminded constantly of a previous existence, and that when we are brought face to face with beauty or with virtue or with truth, in short wherever we are moved to admiration as in contemplating a work of art like the chryselephantine Zeus at Olympia, it is the memory stirring in us of the place from which we came; and, further, she asked me if I had never felt an inexplicable sadness mingling with all beauty, as if beauty itself were inseparable from sorrow. 'Yes, Diotima,' I answered, 'in the presence of beauty we are all sufferers.' 'Then Socrates,' she said, 'let me tell you that this feeling of sadness in the presence of beauty is in reality a sense of

exile ; for however deeply we may drink of Lethe, the soul will retain some broken memories of the garden of the gods. When we meet with beauty in the world it is but a mutilated fragment of the divine beauty, but however small or slight it may be in itself, it is sufficient to call up into memory the divine beauty ; and it is then that the sense of exile rushes in upon us like a wave and we weep and suffer anguish, and can neither tear ourselves away from the beautiful thing, nor be content with it ; but all our being thirsts after the more perfect beauty. But let me warn you, Socrates, that however much you may be tortured in the presence of the beauty that lies scattered through the world, it is your business to collect each tiny fragment ; and if it be a few bars of music you must build it into a song ; if it be a mere tangle of coloured skeins you must weave it into a garment ; if it be fragments of gold and ivory you must make them into a statue ; if it be beautiful colours you must make them into a picture, or beautiful words then into a poem ; and all this time you will suffer and be tortured with desire for the more perfect beauty. But, until you have gathered together the broken fragments which are in the world you will not

return into the garden of the gods.' 'Then the gods exist?' I enquired. 'Certainly the gods exist,' answered Diotima; 'but they exist in a manner peculiar to themselves.' She would say nothing more, but when I questioned her smiled wisely and was silent."

Hermogenes met Lysis by the porch of the King Archon near the house of Callias.

"Have you heard the news, Hermogenes," said Lysis, "I have just been with Euripides. Protagoras is drowned. Within sight of Sicily a storm came up and drove the boat on the rocks. The sailors saved themselves by swimming; but Protagoras, who could not swim, sat on the prow of the boat. They saw him from the beach sitting calmly until the boat split in two. The waves reached out for him, and in a little time his bruised and battered body was cast up at their feet. As they reached for it it was snatched away by another wave. And so the sea played with him like a cat playing with a mouse. Then he was flung ashore. His face was bloody but smiling."

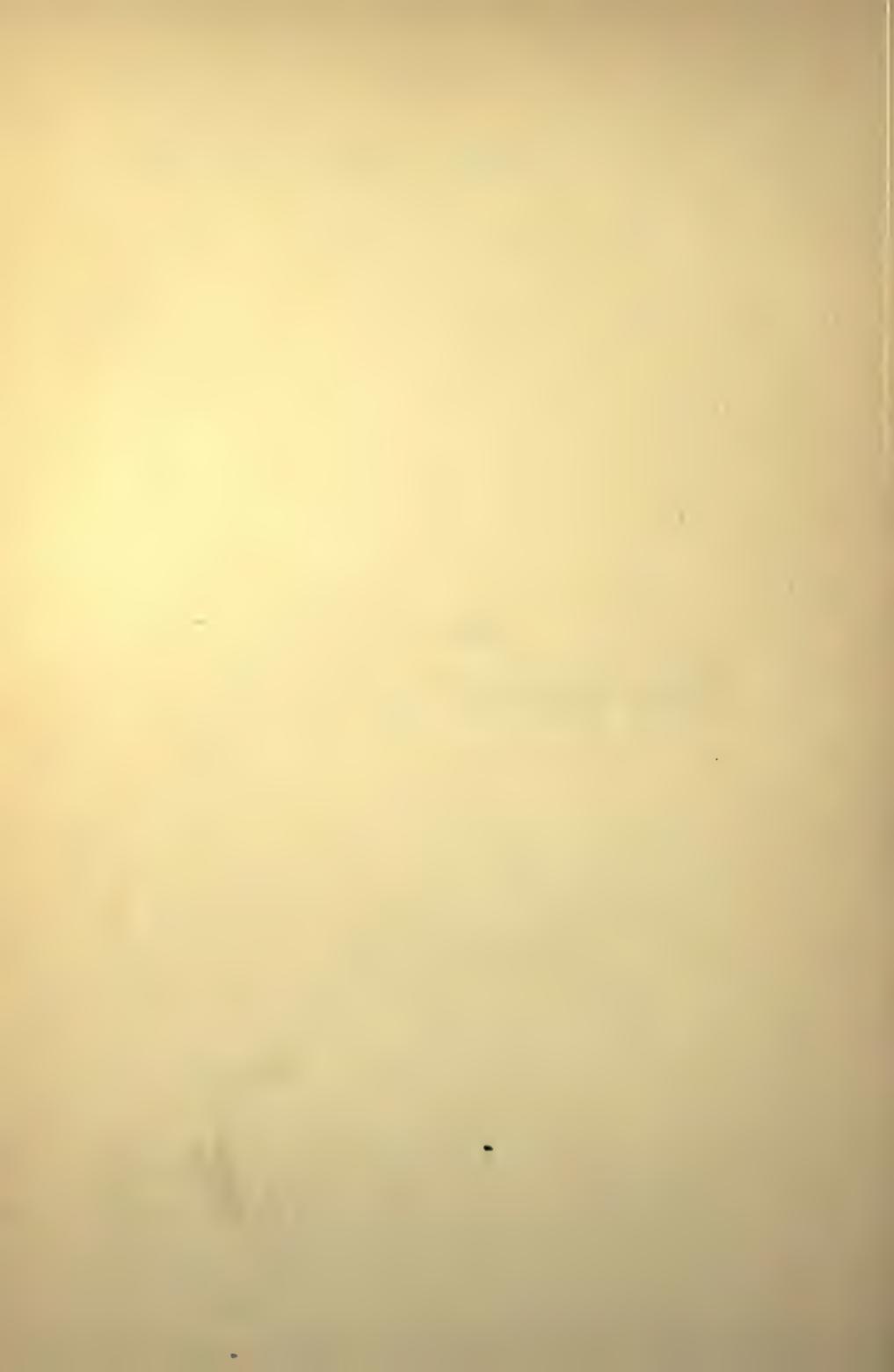
"It was a judgment of the gods," said Hermogenes.

"So everybody says."

To MRS ALFRED FOWLER

III

THE FRIEND OF PAUL



III

THE FRIEND OF PAUL

THE house of Serenus lay about four miles from Gades, in a country of vines and olives. It was built a little below the ridge of a hill, which sheltered it from the north-east winds, and fronted south-west, overlooking the Atlantic and a long stretch of the coast-line with its innumerable headlands and curving bays. From the windows in the upper storey Serenus could see this wide expanse of waters, never completely the same, but always restless and troubled, with caprice in sunlight, or anger in storms; or, turning to another aspect, the hills and valleys of his own estate; a land of cornfields, vineyards, and olive-yards, pleasantly diversified by slopes of green upland pasture, and beyond them the wild beauty of mountains with frosty summits and well-timbered flanks. The house was surrounded by a garden planted with myrtles and plane-

trees, with alleys screened from the fierce heat of summer by dense boughs of ilex, curving tortuously in labyrinthine windings, or running perfectly straight until they ended in an arch, the frame, as it were, for some picture of land or sea. The grass by the paths was kept mown, but here and there, among thickets of myrtle, grew rank, harbouring the green lizards, who slipped out every now and then to bask in the sunlight on the marble steps, or on the pedestals of the statues of Priapus and the woodland gods.

Beyond the garden, Ceres crowded abundantly into every corner. Half a mile away, at the foot of the hill, its red-tiled roofs just showing above the terraced vines, was the house of the farm-bailiff; thither came the tall daughters of the peasantry bringing the offerings of their mothers in plaited baskets, pale honey in its wax, young leverets, and capons luscious for cooking. In the yard all the crowd of common poultry wandered about, while the tower echoed with the joy of pigeons, answered from the neighbouring trees by the cooing of ring-doves and white turtles. Thither also, on feast-days, or to the humble marriage of one of their companions, all the slaves of the estate were bidden, the huntsmen with the

herds ; and Serenus would sit among them, eating the same fare and drinking the same wine, while much wood burnt to the festal Lares.

As he grew older, Serenus had come to love the tranquil life at his country-house, the soft, warm air blowing from off the sea, the noise of rippling water and of wind stirring in the leaves. He had arrived at that period of life when a man is content to stand aside and become a spectator. In the last few years his hold upon the management of his large properties had been gradually relaxed, and he had come to rely more and more upon one or two trusted slaves and freedmen ; but at irregular intervals he would make a journey to all his possessions in Spain, visiting Bilbilis where he had iron-fields, and bred horses ; a delightful country it was, "high Bilbilis enriched by arms and horses ; Caunus austere with snows, and the broken hills of Vadevero, the sweet grove of Botrodus which Pomona loves."

His interests extended in many directions : he was concerned in the mines of Spain ; he owned a fleet of ships which sailed to Rome, and beyond, even to Corinth ; his agents followed the army to buy slaves ; and he

lent money, though principally for political purposes, to the young officials, half civil and half military, for whom the government of a province was a means to fortune and imperial favour at Rome. At first this villa in the country had been used only in the hottest months of the year, and the site chosen because there seemed always to be some mysterious currents of air flowing about it from the cool hills toward the sea, and because innumerable springs had their sources in the rocks; but gradually there woke in him that living interest in rural pleasures and labours, which was always an instinct with the Romans even during their worst decadence; he became glad at any time to visit it, and drink in its mild delicious air in that peaceable garden overlooking the mysterious sea.

The need for leisure grew upon him, and he added a wing to the originally modest house in order that he might transport thither his libraries from Gades; he transported also his Greek statues, his tables of citrus wood and ivory, his myrrhine vases; he built a roofed colonnade, pierced with windows on both sides, and with movable shutters, so that the weather-side might be closed at will; he

devised rooms to catch all the winter sun, and rooms shaded by vines which were cool through the hottest days ; he built sumptuous baths, and a new triclinium, and new guest-chambers ; by every window, colonnade, and walk he planted roses and violets to sweeten the air ; and he stocked his fish ponds with rare fish for the table.

But in spite of the later more sumptuous buildings, and new elegances which he brought with him, he did not forget that he had come into the country in order to be with the elementary conditions of life. He felt very near to this earth which furnished him with everything he ate. From the time the wheat was sown until it came upon his table in little loaves it had been handled by none except his own slaves. At the vintage, he would go out to the wine-press and gaze on the wine-jars, as they were carried into the cellar to stand with the older jars, in which mellowed the fragrance of earlier autumns ; and day after day, in a broad-brimmed hat and worn military cloak, he would walk down to the farm and listen to the pleasant, familiar noises, the clamour of the geese, the lambs calling to their full mothers, the cooing of the pigeons in the tower, the murmur of

the bees about the populous hives ; and the children hung shyly about him, for he generally brought them some nuts, and would tempt the wild-eyed things toward him, holding the nuts in his open hand, as a man might tempt a bird with crumbs.

He was still fond of hunting, fond of the deep shadow of the woods, the stealthy alertness, the cunning and science of wood-craft, he felt that he could best repel the advance of age by such exercises ; but even in the woods perhaps his chief pleasure was in a kind of meditation, a conversation with himself, induced by that silence which the sport imposed ; and, when the boars had been finally driven into the nets and slain, he would sit beside them, eating bread which he dipped in wine, and writing on his tablets, in a small, fine hand, the thoughts suggested by the day's journey. It seemed to him that the physical exercise, the free play of the air on face and limbs, awakened an equal vivacity and alertness in the mind ; and that Minerva, no less than Diana, was a goddess of the deep solitudes. Two Roman officers from Gades, Sulpicianus Rufus and Marcus Licinius were his usual hunting companions.

After his morning exercise, Serenus was

used to take a cold bath, and then sleep for a little while during the heat of the day. Coming from his bath one morning, a little before noon, he found his two friends in the hall.

“Seneca is dead;” was the news they brought him.

Then, in one of the libraries, he learned the details.

Rufus had been a friend of Seneca, and the story had come direct to him. The three friends were strangely moved. Marcus and Serenus listened in silence as Rufus described the scene at the villa.

“He asked for his will, that he might make some bequests to his friends; but this was forbidden. Turning then, to his wife and the two friends who were dining with him, he said that since Nero had murdered his mother and brother it was not to be expected that he might spare the instructor of his youth. Paulina desired to die with him, and the physician opened the veins of both. But Seneca’s blood would not flow, and he drank poison; finally, he was carried to a warm bath, and died. Paulina’s wounds were bound up, by command of Nero, and she still lives.”

“She is more to be pitied,” said Serenus.
“What others died?”

Rufus gave their names.

“Lucan, too!” exclaimed Serenus. “Does Gallio still live?”

“I have not heard of his death; but it is impossible that he would escape.”

“Yes,” said Serenus; “Seneca’s family is annihilated. It is like the working of Nemesis. We have been the spectators of one of Fate’s tragedies, which are so rare. It is complete, large, full of irony; and Seneca’s own words, ‘the murderer of his mother and brother would not spare the instructor of his youth!’ One thinks of them less as Seneca’s own words, than as the sardonic comment of a later historian. They are too apt.”

“You were not one of Seneca’s friends,” said Rufus.

“No,” said Serenus; “Nero is the direct result of Seneca’s teachings. So brutal a voluptuary could hardly issue from any but a Stoic school. It is at once raw, crude, and narrow; it coarsens our natural appetites instead of refining them. For Stoicism the human emotions, love and pity, are but weaknesses, which it denies and attempts to stifle. It is very far from the secret of human sympathy. Nero as a young man had many

excellent qualities, which an artistic and delicate training might have developed into fine accomplishments: he might have learned the art of life; and instead he has learned only rhetoric, the sort of rhetoric that vitiates every action, and makes our emotions the subject for a stage declamation, makes life a mere piece of acting. Yet I must not forget, Rufus, that Seneca was your friend. Perhaps he was better than his philosophy; but I have never been able to forgive him either for his adulation of Claudius during his life, or his satire upon him after his death."

"Seneca was un-Roman," said Marcus.

"Why do you say that?" enquired Serenus.

"All his ideals were un-Roman," answered Marcus. "His notions of the brotherhood and natural equality of man, his unpractical nature and sentimentalism, his absolute lack of a grasp upon realities and their significance, his condemnation of war and of slavery. His life was composed almost entirely of noble maxims, and of trivial actions."

"He died well," said Rufus tersely.

"A final gesture," said Marcus, rubbing his arm. "We Romans are superbly self-conscious. We die in public, with appropriate speeches."

“What you think peculiar to Seneca, his sentimentalism and idealism, are really parts of the present spirit, and common to all schools,” answered Serenus. “Rome has broken down the ancient national barriers, and given to all peoples the notion of humanity as a whole. It is from this cause that the idea of a world-state has its origin. But Rome governs by force; other nations are tributary to her; she has enslaved them; they are the base upon which she has raised her grandeur. They feel that they are unjustly treated. We have created new conditions. We have shut them off from their legitimate activities by refusing to allow them to govern themselves, or to make war upon their neighbours; so that the whole life of the Empire is centralised in Rome, and the provinces have become stagnant. And from these new conditions has been born a new spirit. Life seems too full of suffering; the poor and the oppressed are many, and because they are so many they are becoming articulate. They would build a new heaven and a new earth. I learnt of this first at Corinth.”

“The whole corruption of the world comes from the Greeks and the Jews,” said Rufus contemptuously. “What is the use of

clamouring against life? It is a problem that we must each solve for ourselves, and no theory will help us. If society were wrong, if Rome were wrong, if force were wrong, we should not be sitting here in comparative comfort. To talk of the tyranny of the State is nonsense; individual liberty is what each man wins for himself, and the State merely offers the most convenient mechanism by which it may be gained. As an example we have the growth of a large class of rich freedmen. The disease, from which we are suffering at present, is simply a form of sentimentality. What is morality? What is justice? What is good? The only answer is: 'That which law orders.'

"Do you believe in the gods, Rufus?" enquired Marcus, with amusement.

"I follow the customs of my forefathers," answered Rufus bluntly.

"The gods are dead," said Marcus, still rubbing his arm.

"They are not dead," answered Serenus gently; "but they have changed their names. The people will always worship the same Divinity, the Giver of rain and good crops and victory in battle, and health in life, and peace toward death."

"I never understood Seneca's philosophy;

but I loved the man," said Rufus. "The greater part of him was weakness, but he had strength. He was a good man of business, Serenus."

"He was a clever man, with admirable opportunities," answered Serenus. "I am an Epicurean, and Seneca's teaching is not mine. Yet, in some of its details his teaching is also Epicurean. With him, philosophy was less an affair of the mind than of the imagination, and of good taste; it is always the artist, the orator, who is teaching, and his eloquence is never quite persuasive, because the artist is never quite persuaded. He belongs to no school, he is an eclectic; and he seeks rather to inculcate the practice of virtue than to show what virtue is. He neither asks nor answers a question. The vices and weaknesses which he condemned in others he had found in himself; his was a subjective, a poetic, a romantic mind. And it was precisely for this reason that his disciples loved him, because of that emotional and many coloured nature, which saw virtue, the most austere virtue, ever as a goal, and found it unattainable."

"Yes, that is true," said Rufus.

"But did Seneca believe in the gods, and in the immortality of the soul?" enquired Marcus.

Serenus smiled.

“ Yes,” he answered ; “ Seneca spent his whole life in seeking for the truth, but the truth for which he sought was one which should be agreeable to his own nature. A divinity was necessary to his well-being. He speaks of a loving God, of a God who orders the world aright and whose will we should obey without a murmur ; and in consequence his hatred for the Epicureans was great. He could not forgive us for showing the gods serene and untroubled in their abode, into which penetrates no whisper of mortal anguish ; and for saying that no voice of prayer troubles their endless pleasure, and that without tears or anger they gaze at once upon our sorrow and our sin, and are heedless of the hands uplifted in supplication from every corner of the earth. Yes ; God is necessary to a Stoic. But we Epicureans have called upon the gods and they have not answered us ; we have sought them throughout the world and have not found them ; neither are they in the seas nor in the skies ; we have not seen them destroy the wicked nor protect the innocent ; we think that they are not interested in our humble affairs ; they are neither our masters nor our creators, but belong to the same order

of things as we do, though of a finer and less perishable nature: if, indeed, they exist at all."

"Stoicism is a hatred of humanity," said Marcus; "perhaps Epicureanism is a love of it. Rufus, do you not think the Epicureans are clever? They do not deny the existence of gods; but they make their gods of such a divinely intangible substance that doubt becomes in itself almost an act of worship. It is as if they feared to profane the sanctuary with human feet soiled by the dust of travail."

"I have given you my opinion of philosophy and philosophers," said Rufus. "Once a man begins to think of the difference between right and wrong he is lost, morally and mentally. I studied philosophy in order to learn how to write despatches; and in the short course I took, I acquired enough knowledge of the subject to know that good and evil belong to the category of reflex actions, they are spasmodic movements over which we have no control. Do I praise my legionaries because they are brave? I do, as a matter of fact. It makes an admirable prelude to the imposition of another task. Seneca imagined that men could be disciplined into virtue. It was a great mistake, because discipline is not

applicable to the individual, it is only applicable to a crowd. It is easy to fill a regiment with courage; but it is impossible to make one man brave."

"You do not think that it is possible to form individual habits?" said Serenus.

"Yes, of course," answered Rufus; "it is possible to accustom a man to sleep on a hard bed, to deny himself wine or flesh, even in some degree to control his temper. But an action is good or bad, only in so far as it is a reflex action."

"What you say is very curious," said Serenus quickly.

"In fact Rufus is a complete philosopher," said Marcus, laughing. "I should like to drink a little wine."

Serenus struck a sounding-bowl of silver, and a Greek boy entered.

"Wine," said Serenus, and the boy left them. "Rufus, you have heard of a sect of Jews called Christians; do you know their belief?"

"No," said Rufus contemptuously; "I only know that it is against the Jewish religion to pay tribute. I believe that they have no religion; they are contemptuous of all known gods; they will eat no flesh which has been

offered in the temples; and they loathe the whole human race: a feeling which, I think, is reciprocated. The Christians seem to be one of the numerous sects given over to the practice of a depraved and fantastic superstition. The East is full of such monstrous cults."

The Greek boy set wine before them, threw a few grains of incense on a brazier, and departed softly. Marcus drank a white Greek wine; Rufus poured himself out a large bowl of Falernian.

"I take mine with a great deal of water," said Serenus; "because my stomach is weak. Alas! sometimes I think it is my stomach which has taught me the virtue of moderation. I have heard a man, who was a Christian, speak in almost the identical words of Seneca. The cardinal point of his doctrine was not the Stoic apathy, but the recommendation of sympathy, that is the difference between them. Here and there he uses the same phrases and illustrations as Seneca. It shows how widespread the new spirit is."

"Seneca's teaching did not interest me," answered Rufus. "It was the man I loved. Though it is long since I saw him, I cannot believe that he was contaminated by Judaism.

Serenus felt a curious desire to disburden himself.

“I went a great deal among the Christians once,” he said softly.

The two men looked at him for a moment, with that curious expression of distrust which men adopt when another confesses to some social indiscretion.

“It was nearly nine years ago, and perhaps my nature resembled Seneca’s then; my philosophy was an affair of the heart. I was seeking for a beauty that is not of this world. It was at Corinth. I met a man named Paul.”

“All things are possible at Corinth,” said Rufus. “Tell us your story, Serenus.”

“And then we shall stay to dinner,” said Marcus, as he finished his wine.

“It is a long story,” said Serenus, smiling. “I have written it on a roll, and shall read it to you. Let us go out into the garden; it is cool and pleasant there now. Lysis will bring you what you want. Do you remember telling me, Rufus, that Seneca drew you to him by his weakness? Paul drew me to him by his strength.”

Passing out of the library through the atrium

the friends crossed a small courtyard enclosed on three sides, and turning sharp to the left began to climb the slope which sheltered the house. The walk was shaded by a thick hedge of ilex, and there were tall, slim cypresses at irregular intervals. Leaving the path, they crossed a plot of grass, starry with little flowers, and, passing through a thicket of myrtles, came presently to a semicircular stone seat shaded by beeches which stood, eastward, a little way behind it. Falling water tinkled like little silver bells somewhere close to them ; and the leaves made a pleasant whispering noise. Lysis covered the seat with rugs, and left them. The seat faced westward, overlooking the olive-yards which the winds flushed to silver ; and the friends had a magnificent view of the Atlantic. In the declining light the distant promontories, blue and lemon, seemed to jut out into a bath of liquid colours, as if suspended in the vague ; and the horizon was indeterminate. A fleet of fishing-boats, some miles from the shore, seemed like small, brown moths with motionless wings that had settled upon a flat screen of transparent blue gauze, and about them the light gleamed and flickered upon innumerable little dancing waves. It was all blue and green, but so pale and silent

as to seem a mirage. Marcus, lounging easily upon the wide seat, looked over the prospect with unconscious enjoyment. Rufus sat with his chin in his hands.

“I love to sit here on tranquil evenings,” said Serenus; “and listen for the cry of the halcyon, or the heavy plunge of a dolphin, drifting up through the delicious air from the bay.”

He unrolled his manuscript, and presently began to read, in a smooth, low voice:—

“When Venus rose out of the foam and froth of Ocean it was upon the prow of a Phœnician trader, that carried her into every part of the known world; and when her worship fell away and her votaries became few, the cult of Venus Pandemos still flourished at Corinth, and her temples there were served by a thousand priestesses. There she loves to have her abiding place, where she can look out upon two seas, and watch the sail-winged ships bringing her tribute from distant lands; she is the lure, beckoning them over the pathless sea. The port Cenchrea is surrounded by green hills and pine forests, and through the stone-pines at dawn the sun sends his first level rays, so that their trunks show black

against the gold. The streets are infested with traders of all nations ; Jews and Syrians swarm there ; child courtesans with delicate and innocent faces pluck strangers by the sleeve and smile ; the quays and streets are crowded with the booths of merchants and moneychangers, whose gay awnings striped red or yellow glare vividly in the sunlight ; and doves are everywhere, fluttering about the streets, fanning the air with a soft pulse of wings, alighting upon awnings and architraves to preen their feathers, running swiftly among the passengers on their pink feet and cooing, cooing softly like the young girls who touch men on the sleeve, the very gentle, insinuating whisper of Aphrodite.

“ I arrived at Corinth in the beginning of December, and remember well the gaiety, animation, and bustle of the scene as I watched it from the steps of the temple ; for a long time I fed my sight upon that busy, amorous, wholly pleasure-loving crowd, until, at last, the red and yellow awnings so hot and vivid even in the winter sunlight, the perpetual passing to and fro of men and women, the continual change and motion of colours, and the humming noise, all combined in a curious hypnotic effect upon my nerves.

What had seemed the very epitome of life became a mere stage-scene, and then again nothing but the dance of motes in a sunbeam.

“ It irritated me and then tired me. I turned from the Temple of Venus and sought that of Apollo, where I rested a little time in peace. Then I went to the house of my agent, with whom I was to lodge until I had taken a house for my own use. The man was kindly, but tactless ; his tedious anxiety to please distracted and irritated me, he was so much at my service that I could find no possible use for him. I said I wished to bathe, and my host insisted on coming with me. It was amusing to watch his air of importance as he conducted me through the crowded ways, for he was a notable person in the city, and every other man we met greeted us ; as we paused a moment before a funeral procession I heard a voice saying : ‘ That is Serenus, a cousin of Acte’s Serenus,’ and once again I felt the intolerable stare of curious eyes, that dropped obsequiously when I met them. After my bath, my host led me to the Prefect’s palace, for I had letters to Gallio, and then at last he left me. Gallio received me charmingly ; his manners are those of a man who has known

and forgotten everything. He begged me to dine, and to stay with him until I had found a house ; but I excused myself on the score of business and fatigue. He smiled, answered that he would always be glad of my company, and I left him.

“Once again in the streets, that vivid and passionate life appealed to me with a new sympathy ; I read beneath the superficial gaiety and glitter, the human tragedy, the flight of pleasures and the irrevocable advance of death ; women passed me in soft murmuring draperies, smiled at me languorously and passed on leaving the air tainted with Eastern perfumes. I noticed that even as they smiled their eyes were wistful. The delicate winter sunset began. I called a boy to me and asked him to guide me to the house of Caius, whom I wished to see personally on some business connected with the outfit of my ship. He led me to a house in the Jews’ quarter and I tapped at the door. A freedwoman admitted me, looked at me with surprise, and was just going to speak but changed her mind and led me toward the doorway of a room whence came a sound of some one reading. Light fell through the doorway as she drew back the curtain ; and she motioned me to enter ;

but I drew back in astonishment, for a voice was reading aloud these words: ‘Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not love, I am become sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal. And though I have prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith so that I could remove mountains, and have not love, I am nothing. And if I give away in food all my goods, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not love, it profiteth me nothing.’

“ The grave voice ceased, for the servant had beckoned the reader, and presently Caius came toward me. I gave him my orders with reference to the sails and tackling of my ship, and spoke of other ships of mine which he had refitted for me; and then asked him what author he had been reading. For a moment he hesitated, and then answered that he had been reading to some friends a letter by Paul, an apostle of Christ. I enquired if I might look a little more closely at it as I had been interested in what I heard; and after hesitating again for a moment he brought it me. The scroll half opened in my hands and I read:—

“ ‘ For behold your calling, brethren, how

that not many wise after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called, but God chose the foolish things of the world, that he might put to shame them that are wise ; and God chose the weak things of the world, that he might put to shame the things that are strong ; and the base things of the world, and the things that are despised, did God choose, yea, and the things that are not, that he might bring to nought the things that are.' Mine eyes followed the words as the roll opened : ' Howbeit we speak wisdom among the perfect ; yet a wisdom not of this world, nor of the rulers of this world, which are coming to nought ; but we speak God's wisdom in a mystery, even the wisdom that hath been hidden, which God foreordained before the worlds unto our glory ; which none of the rulers of this world knoweth ; for had they known it they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.' My sight ran heedlessly over the next few lines until they came to these words : ' For I think, God hath set forth us the apostles last of all, as men doomed to death ; for we are made a spectacle unto the world, and to angels, and to men. We are fools for Christ's sake, but ye are wise in Christ ; we are weak, but ye

are strong; ye have glory but we have dishonour. Even unto this present hour we both hunger, and thirst, and are naked, and are buffeted, and have no certain dwelling-place; and we toil, working with our own hands; being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we endure; being defamed, we entreat; we are made as the filth of the world, the off-scouring of things, even until now. . . . What will ye, shall I come unto you with a rod, or in love, and a spirit of meekness ?'

"I rolled up the scroll, and gave it back to Caius, saying that I should like to read it all, but that at the moment I had not the time; and I suggested that he should lend it to me. He shook his head, murmuring that it was not his property, that it was only deposited in his house for safe keeping, and the convenience of those who wished to consult it; but he offered to let me see it, in his house, at any time that I might wish. I said that perhaps I might come again, and went out into the street. I do not think that I had any intention of coming again; but as the women passed me in the moonlit streets, and the beggar children held out their supplicating hands, I seemed to hear the words: 'If I give away in food all my goods,

and though I give my body to be burned and have not love, it profiteth me nothing.'

"Yes; I felt it in those streets, where little girls, still children and innocent, aped with a diabolic mimicry the manners and allurements of the women who followed me, followed me with a soft, rippling noise of draperies and odour of cosmetics, like shadows, like ghosts. In the city of the goddess of pleasure, I seemed to learn, for the first time, the secret of pain. But beyond and above that sympathy with this drifting helpless mass that is humanity, I felt a curious desire to learn more of the personality of the writer who could write: 'If any man considereth himself wise among you, let him become a fool that he may be wise, and threaten to come among his disputing disciples with a rod.' His humility seemed to overpass the bounds of pride, his words were whips, his contempt for argument and disputation burned with a superhuman energy. He seemed to say: 'These are but words, empty sounds. I teach you the truth, accept it humbly; have I not suffered for it, and will you, who have but enjoyed it in peace and plenty, attempt to alter it?'

"I came back to my lodgings, and the

woman who had followed me turned away with a sigh.

“The next ten days I spent on business ; and I went a great deal to the Prefect’s palace where the conversation of Gallio and his friends charmed and delighted me. Gallio saw the world and the Empire drifting toward a complete breakdown. Civilisation, according to him, filled man with desires which he can never gratify ; it tended to accentuate the difference between the poor and the rich, and the whole question resolved itself for him into a question of politics. The Roman stock was perishing, and its place was being taken by a horde of servile races. The people were only being kept in check by a system of doles, and amused with pageants. The burden of taxation was becoming insufferable.

“It may last our time,” he said with a smile ; “but the disease is ineradicable. A revolution, or a series of great wars, might carry us forward for a time. We are suffering from a mortal sickness, growth, which inevitably brings decay.”

It had been arranged that one of my ships should follow three weeks after my departure from Gades ; and on my arrival at lazy Naples,

I had intended to wait for it, consequently I had remained there for three weeks and a few days, and the other ship not coming by that time I continued my voyage to Brundusium. There again I waited, anxious for news, and at last reluctantly put out to sea without it. It arrived at Corinth fourteen days after I did, and brought me a letter from my nephew, but none from my wife. In an agony of doubt I opened it, and read that my wife and child had died of a fever which had afflicted them a few days after my departure. First my son had died, a boy little more than three years old ; and my wife, after lingering some time, followed him. I had moved into my own house, and was alone. Sending a messenger to my agent I bade him see to all things ; and told him that I wished to be left undisturbed. The words of the Master came to me :

“ *Nam iam non domus accipiet te læta neque uxor
Optima, nec dulces occurrent oscula nati
Præripere, et tacita pectus dulcedine tangent.* ”

It seemed to me that the peace and tranquillity of my home, the sole aim of my life, having been shrivelled up like unsubstantial things, vanished like dreams, life had thrown

me, too, aside and left me stranded, a piece of wreckage, upon this alien shore. For many days I sat alone in my sumptuous house, and the statues of the gods, blithe Greek things, which I had bought to furnish it, and for transhipment to the new home which I had meant to make at Rome, smiled at my unavailing tears. Then one morning my slaves admitted a young boy to my presence.

“Caius bids me tell you that Paul is in Corinth,” he said.

“I shall go,” I answered.

After he had left me, I repented. Why should I choose to frequent the Jews and miracle-mongers of Corinth, who swarmed there on the way to Rome from every part of the East, astrologers, and sellers of love-potions, poisoners, and go-betweens? But the words rose up in my mind: “God chose the foolish things of the world, that he might put to shame them that are wise:” and I wished to be ashamed. In my weakness and grief my hands went forth and groped in the darkness, seeking the hands of those who had also suffered, seeking for the little familiar, common-place things, that twine themselves round our being and are the mainstays of life. My

abandonment of life in my grief had been so complete, that but for the message which came to me from Caius, I might have drifted towards self-destruction, merely because of the sullen inertia, which followed after the force of the blow had been spent. Philosophy, religion, discipline, every vain convention which we imagine may buttress our will in moments of great spiritual weakness, fell away from me like garments, and the only thing remaining was a sense of human sympathy, a craving for human consolation.

Our master, Epicurus, was a lover of children ; he knew, no one better, their delicate and insinuating ways, the strange unreal world in which they play, their unconsciousness of time ; and he seems to have taken them as patterns and exemplars of the life of pleasure, unsuspecting of the future, and forgetful of the past, but living always with a vivid intensity, in that little, shut-in pleasure-house of the senses, the moment. As I thought of my child, I remembered all his caresses, the soft touch of his flower-like hands upon my face, and the grave eyes that seemed to keep a wisdom older than the world ; and beside that image in my dreams stooped another, Drusilla, her hands guiding him to me, she whose whole

life was like some attenuated fragrance, difficult of apprehension, but inexpressibly sweet, her quiet brows with neat bands of hair smoothed against the cool flesh ; and the love that grew between us, first for what she revealed to me, and then for what she hid. When I thought of these two brief, beautiful creatures, I seemed to see in them the true fragility of life, as if it were no more than wind in the stops of a flute or sweet vibration from the strings of a lyre, aerial, elusive, never to be wholly imprisoned in any one form, but wandering, vocal, through the whole of creation, illuminating it to one exquisite moment, like light upon hill and sea, and then vanishing, fleeing away into darkness, never to be exactly repeated.

So to me, sitting apart and outwardly unmoved, there came that fierce hunger for things departed, that blind, bitter struggle against the unalterable conditions of life.

I hesitated, and delayed to set out on my adventure until well on into the night. At last I went. A fresh wind was blowing from the north-west, it stung my face and eyes, and I saw that snow lay lightly upon the summit of Acrocorinth, silvery in the moonlight. As I passed into the Jews' quarter I

began to meet little knots and groups of people talking with excited gestures, and I heard rumours of brawls and quarrels; but I reached the house of Caius without incident. The same boy who had brought me the message admitted me. He had fine clear-cut features, distinctive of no particular race, though with evidence of Roman blood somewhere. Caius was the son of a freedman I gathered later, and this boy was the eldest of his two children, the other being a girl. The boy told me that the meeting was over, but that Caius was with Paul and his travelling companions in an upper chamber; he led the way and I followed. I felt cold and suspicious, but curious. The boy drew back the curtain, whispered my name, and I went into the warmly-lighted room. Seated by the brazier was a thick-set, crook-backed man, ugly and mean, with a small head, much too small for his shoulders, a sallow skin and thick beard. As I entered he lifted his face; the eyebrows met above the beaky nose, and he regarded me for a moment in complete silence. The eyes were piercing, as though full of smouldering fires. They seemed to explore the most secret recesses of my soul; then to grow kinder, as if recognising something in it.

“ Peace be with you, and light, and understanding,” he said; and as he spoke there seemed to me a hesitation and an embarrassment in his manner. I murmured something in reply, at which, perhaps, a slight smile broke about his lips, and he turned away. Caius brought me the manuscript which I had looked at, gave me a chair in a warm corner by a lamp, and went back to the others. I began to read. Four men, besides Caius, and a woman were gathered at a table by Paul. One of the men was holding a pen. Then the voice of Paul broke the silence.

“ For the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh. That the ordinance of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the spirit. For they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the spirit, the things of the spirit. For the mind of the flesh is death; but the mind of the spirit is life and peace. . . . And if Christ

is in you, the body is dead because of sin, but the spirit is life because of righteousness."

Holding the manuscript on my knees, I listened. The passion of the speaker seized and held me; he was like one so full of speech as to be inarticulate, he seemed to falter through many phrases until he found the right one; he would go on blindly, following the mere impulse of his mind, without thought or reason, until at last, as with pain, words came to him that seemed to touch the heart, to illuminate hidden places, and what had gone before was transfused and crystallised by it into a kind of rude and imperfect unity. Sometimes after one of these magnificent utterances, he would give forth phrase after phrase, that glowed with the heat of his own certainty. "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or anguish, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or the sword?" He dealt with speech as one dealing with iron in the fire, hammering out the words. "Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor

powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus, our Lord."

He was persuaded. Seeing that they had forgotten me, I lifted my eyes and studied him as he spoke. I saw that his health was bad ; the carriage of his head seemed epileptic, but bodily health was nothing to him ; he seemed worn with travel and hunger, misfortune and persecution, yet the fire of his speech showed the strength of his conviction ; even as, in his words, he seemed to thrust the world away from him for the sake of an idea, so, for the sake of an idea he had thrust away his infirmities, and pursued his way heedless of obstacles. " Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it. Why didst thou make me thus ? Or, hath not the potter a right over the clay, from the same lump to make one part a vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour ? "

Sometimes Paul moved a little, with nervous half-conscious movements ; or while speaking he would stretch his large toil-worn hands over the brazier where the light gleaming through the fingers made them seem more distorted. As a rule he spoke slowly, but

when he became dominated by his thought the words hurried, more and more quickly, until the writer paused, perplexed, and, not without a slight gesture of impatience followed by a swifter smile as if of encouragement, Paul would repeat himself; sometimes losing the thread of his discourse. Indeed, from what I learned of his life, it seemed that it was his fate to be thwarted and hindered by material restrictions, of health, of liberty, of speech. No vessel was capable of sustaining the flame that burned in him. I could not understand all that he said, as I knew nothing of what was behind; but here and there his words burnt into my brain.

The man who had been writing stopped, stretched his cramped fingers; and Paul motioned another to his place: "Abhor that which is evil, cleave to that which is good. In love of the brethren be tenderly affectioned one to another. . . . patient in tribulation, continuing steadfastly in prayer, communicating to the necessities of the saints, given to hospitality. Bless them that persecute you; bless, and curse not. Rejoice with them that rejoice; weep with them that weep. . . . Be not wise in your own conceits. Render unto

no man evil for evil. . . . Let every soul be in subjection to the higher powers: for there is no power but of God; and the powers that be are ordained of God." I had sat listening to these words of conviction until I felt numbed, yet I was not satisfied.

Paul also seemed to weary for a minute. The word "love" that seemed to contain all their mystical creed fell again from his lips: "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself; Love worketh no ill to his neighbour; Love therefore is the fulfilment of the law; and this knowing the season, that now it is high time for you to awake out of sleep."

He ceased, rose and walked to the window, drew back the curtain, and leaned out as if to cool his head. The sky was grey with dawn. From the streets below came drunken voices of men and women, singing ribald songs; and presently I heard the tramp of the armed guard. For a moment Paul leaned there.

"The night is far spent," he said, "and the day is at hand; therefore let us cast off the works of darkness and put on the armour of light. Let us walk honestly, as in the day; not in revelling and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and jealousy. But put ye on the Lord Jesus

Christ, and make not provision for the flesh to fulfil the lusts thereof."

He ceased, drew the curtain to again, and came towards me. Through his incredible ugliness there shone a majesty of power, fascinating, enchanting, wooing me with its strength and flame-like intensity. His hands were cold from the ledge of the window, and as they took mine a thrill ran through me. The other men looked at us quietly, as if they were conscious of some crisis, and of some antagonism between us. Paul looked at the manuscript upon my knees, and smiled.

"What are my words to you?" he asked.

"I have also thought of these things," I answered him.

"Yes; it is not the thinking of them that is strange, but what do they mean to you? What does our law mean to you? What does our mystery mean to you? Nothing. You are given over to vain imaginations, the conceits of the mind. You have no humility, no faith. Your great possessions have turned your mind. Until the blow fell upon you, you had imagined that you were secure through life. You have put your trust in perishable things, and they have fallen through your fingers like water, like

dry sand. What have you left sacred in the world? Your wisdom has made a desert about you, a desert where there is no God. What have you to hope?"

It was as if he mocked me, pitied me, understood me. He made me cold toward him; and at the same time my sorrow flooded me.

"What is my trouble to you? I can bear it alone," I said harshly. "The things which you have written I have read in our own philosophers."

"You have found nothing else in me which was not in them?"

"Nothing."

A gloom spread over his face, the light which had illuminated it died out, leaving only the smouldering fires of his eyes, which burned dimly. He dropped my hands. The others turned away their eyes and shifted uneasily.

"There is he in whose name I speak. The love of Christ constrained me."

I sat frowning, without comprehension.

"It is not yet time," he continued sadly. "One must have patience, exceeding patience. You do not understand what we teach concerning Christ, who is the Son of God. Yet

you came to us willingly ; you, a Roman, came and took the hand of a Jew, whose touch, to your fellows, is contamination ; and, in my pride I said : Lo ! I have triumphed over the wisdom of the Gentile. It is through God's grace only that I am called to be an apostle to men. It is through his grace alone that you will be saved ; for you will come again. Tell me that you will come again."

"I shall come again," I said simply ; the curious anxiety of his words troubled me vaguely. I felt a profound pity for this man, to whom even a stranger was a brother. I rose and took my cloak ; as I passed out each gave me a salutation, the salutation of peace.

Outside it was dawn. The lupanars were giving up their dead, some sailors and devotees of the great goddess were already congregating in the wine-shops. Muffled as I was in my great coarse cloak they suspected me of being one of the Roman soldiers, and none spoke to me or offered me insult. I did not heed them but passed along the quays, looking at Acrocorinth towering like Eryx, that other home of the sea-born and lure for sailors, into the infinite blue of a cloudless sky. Wreaths of vapour cloaked its lower reaches, and it

seemed like a great dome suspended in the air. On the other side laughed the wide sea in multitudinous ripples of light. It all seemed to reflect some childish half-conscious gaiety of my soul. My sorrow still lay there, but comforted with human sympathy, and the two mystical gifts of the Christians, peace and love.

It was only after I had escaped from the enchantment of his presence that I was able to understand the aims and ambitions of Paul, as he showed them in the letter which he had dictated that night, and which was to be copied and sent to all the communities that had come together in Greece, Asia and Italy. His aim was principally to abolish the restrictions which hampered conversion into his faith, rites of the Jews, circumcision, the use of certain meats which they had considered unclean, and the huge body of formulæ and observances, which had grown and developed out of casuistry and the old Hebrew law; but beyond and above that he wished them to propitiate the civil power. When he spoke of the abolition of the law he meant those rites and ceremonies which seemed a profanation of, a bartering with, the divinity. He

felt that his mission was not to the Jews alone, but to all the nations of the world. In this he was opposed by the more rigid Christians at Jerusalem, who held that circumcision was necessary, and that only a Jew could be saved. One of the most rigid adherents of this narrower sect was a brother of Christ, who seemed to pass his whole life in the Temple, praying and fasting.

Paul was often bitter against this sect. Yet it was out of that same kind of formalism that he himself had sprung; and he seldom lost traces of it, except in a few isolated moments, when love and indignation burnt him up. I went among these Christians again and again; and each time became more fascinated by their hidden, gentle lives. A very intimate tie bound Caius to Paul, for Paul had initiated him into their mysteries, which were, I imagine, the same as in other religions, a purification and a mystic meal. Caius was a man of considerable power, but of immense reserve, from whom I learnt very little. Paul was a fanatic, impatient of the opposition to his teaching at Jerusalem. Sometimes in anger he would satirise his opponents and the rite of circumcision with a bitter and sardonic humour. He was honey

to those he loved, gall to those who withheld him.

The community in Corinth having fallen back during his absence into a moral laxity, almost excusable considering their environment, he withdrew them from all social intercourse with their fellow-citizens. They obeyed because they loved, but more, because they feared him. Before his conversion he had persecuted the Christians to turn them from their faith; afterwards he persecuted them to keep them in it. I learned the story of his conversion. It had its origin in the death of one called Stephen, who had been accused before the Jewish Collegium of blasphemy; a frivolous pretext for the punishment of one's opponents which had obtained everywhere but in Rome.

As you know, the law of the Empire is that no one shall be punished with death except by a Roman court, and only when he has been convicted of specified crimes; for the spirit of Roman usage has always been, in the words of Tiberius, that the injuries of the gods are the gods' affair. Stephen, after an argument with his accusers, suddenly cried out with a loud voice: "Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing at the right hand

of God." With one accord his exasperated enemies stripped off their cloaks and laid them at the feet of Paul, who took charge of them; and they stoned Stephen, Paul consenting to his death.

Even at the time, perhaps, standing aside and taking no part in the murder, Paul's conscience may have reproved him. In any case the incident assumed, afterwards, an enormous importance for him. He could not speak of it without emotion. Perhaps also he feared that he might be accused to the Roman authorities for his part in the riot. His mind became abnormally excited.

Some days afterwards he set out for Damascus to bring up some more Christians to Jerusalem, to be tried by the same barbarous assembly. Suddenly at noon he saw a blinding light, and he fell to the ground. A voice called to him out of the sky. According to some accounts the voice uttered a phrase from Euripides: it is hard for thee to kick against the goads. The phrase had passed into current use. However strange it may seem that a voice from heaven should have uttered these words, it is perfectly natural that Paul should have heard them; he must have heard them before, many times.

But what goads were meant? The pricks of conscience, perhaps, for his share in the murder of Stephen; some secret remorse, against which he had steeled his heart, in the hope that time and use would cure it. Such was the conversion of Paul. His nature had suffered no change from it; he had merely found a new aim for his life, and the same zeal, which he had used in his persecution of the Christians, he now asserted in their cause. To himself this incident of his conversion seemed unnatural, miraculous; but to us it is simple, and easily explained, being merely a repetition of Stephen's vision. As I have already written, he was of delicate health; some nervous, constitutional weakness affected him; epilepsy, perhaps, or something akin to it. His accounts of what happened varied; for he seemed to have told the story in different ways to different people. In one account, those who were with him heard the voice, but did not see the light; and in another version they saw the light, but did not hear the voice. Paul himself had not known Christ in the flesh. He knew little of him, except that he had been born, had gathered about him a group of disciples, had preached, and had died on the cross.

His mind therefore could fashion no clear image in the vision. He could only see a light and hear familiar words. He himself always treated this vision of the risen Master as distinct from the visions which had been manifested to the other disciples, as a purely spiritual manifestation: "and lastly," he said, "He appeared to me as to an abortion." What does he mean by this phrase? Does it mean that Paul's spiritual birth was effected by violence, prematurely; that it was precipitated by the murder of Stephen? Is it remorse for Stephen's death that forces him to apply this hideous epithet to himself; or is it a reference to the lack of definite, sensible impressions; or to the fact of the lateness of his conversion; or merely a scornful reference to his own physical deformities? He was accustomed to speak with a bitter mockery of his infirmities, yet, it seemed also, with a little pride. He mentioned in the letter, which Caius showed me, that he had prayed for the removal of some physical disability, but the prayer had not been granted. The fragility of his vision was even used by his opponents, the small sect practising poverty at Jerusalem, among whom was the brother of their Master, as a ground for denying his mission. One is almost tempted to

agree with them. The evidence is vague, the accounts vary. We may wonder into what form these floating legends will crystallise, if the community endures and increases ; if they will ever form a complete unity, like the myths of Orpheus and Dionysos.

There are some who imagine that Christianity is but one of the many features of the new social movement, which was Gallio's opinion ; but I cannot think so, for the reason that the Christians believe in the rapidly approaching end of the world. They believe that their Master, who was crucified, will return, even before his own generation has passed away, to judge the world. It is the cardinal point of their teaching. Any definite social reconstruction is consequently outside their aims ; but the organisation of their communities, in so far as it can be called an organisation, resembles rather closely our popular funerary societies, which have always been looked upon with suspicion by the authorities.

Paul's exhortation to his community "to be in subjection to the higher powers," was written with the intention of guarding against any outbreak which might prejudice "the powers that be, and are ordained of God," against the communities, who seek only to

be left to the peace of their quiet lives and the practice of their cult. They are a little humble folk for the most part, except where there are Jews among them, and then arises the question of the tribute money; whether it be lawful to pay it? That is the only cause which may put them in conflict with the authorities.

But there is a graver danger to the friends of Paul. They are for the most part humble artisans, followers of the lowest trades, mendicants, and cheap hawkers; despised by all classes, they are at once despised, hated, and feared, by the class immediately above them, with whom they must necessarily enter into competition where the dividing line is faint, or barely drawn at all. Beside this natural jealousy of an alien competition, there is the sense of distrust which the secrecy of their lives breeds in the minds of the citizens. People invariably suspect a man who leads a retired life, either of some shameful practices, or of a guilty past. Yet suspicion and persecution do not suffice to turn this little community out of the way they have chosen. After the day is over, they meet together, as one family, in some dimly-lit room, and greet each other with peace and love. It is time

to awake out of sleep, they say; the hour approaches, the Lord cometh. That is their whole life, they have no active part in the great revolutionary social movement of slaves and freedom, they sit with folded hands, patiently, awaiting the coming of their Lord, who shall judge the world, and end it.

Moving among them, taking part almost in their daily life, a life removed and hidden from the world, how could I blame them? Their credulity even seemed sacred to me, it was so fragile a thing, of such delicate and exquisite growth, a desire which has lain always close to the heart of man. For me, beyond the flaming walls of the world sit the deathless gods in their quiet seats, peace flooding their hearts; and no sound of mortal anguish ascends to them, but they sit ever in their halls shining with silver and glittering with gold, and the lovely lyre makes an immortal music about them, and wine gladdens the feast, and the rhythmic motion of the dancing choirs; but for these poor artisans of Corinth the god is a companion by the way, they love to speak of him under homely words, he is the vine-dresser, the grafter of olives, the sower; he carries into their sordid lives the peace of wide skies and tranquil waters, he is the

shepherd who tends his flock and leads them into pleasant pastures. Yes, behind Paul, the man of fire, whose life was an odyssey, full of arduous endeavour and storm, was another figure, a figure of singular beauty, before whom even the fire of Paul's ardour flickered and was tamed, the Christ whom man had crucified, and who had redeemed man from sin and death. They seemed to have fashioned him out of their own weary lives, their blood and tears ; he had pity on their suffering, and suffered for them ; he had mercy on their sin, and took it upon himself, they could bear all for his sake who had borne all for theirs ; he had revealed to them sympathy and love.

The great central points of their teaching meant nothing to me. The promise for me was void ; but the conditions of the promise, there was the charm. Sometimes I think that if I could have put away from me all my philosophical preoccupations, I would willingly have left everything I possessed, for the sake of that peace, that security, that trust in something outside ourselves, which is infinitely wise, infinitely merciful, infinitely loving. But faith, belief, is not an act of volition, it is the spiritual nature ; it is the possession of children and of simple folk.

To those who have looked into the nature of things, who with Epicurus see man as only the momentary grouping together of a substance essentially transient and mutable, life itself is the end, a life of fine appreciations, retirement, and leisure, and a death that has no awakening. We, too, love our neighbour ; we, too, have charity toward the bruised and broken lives about us ; we, too, recommend all men to hide their lives, to be moderate, to abhor that which is evil and cling to that which is good. We are Christians without Christ.

My own grief was still with me, but a serene and hopeless resignation had taken the place of despair. The memory of Drusilla and my child haunted my waking moments, and daily thoughts, like vain phantoms escaped for a brief moment from the shadowy realm of fabled Proserpina. The past was part of my consciousness ; as it is, I suppose of every man. I began again to frequent the Prefect's palace, to listen to his mellow wisdom which he cloaked in laughing phrase, as we passed easily from one subject to another without exhausting any. Seneca's raillery was dull beside his brother's ; Seneca laughed at women and the comedy of manners, to Gallio

nothing was sacred, not even his philosophic brother. At the same time I still continued to frequent the house of Caius, and the society of the Christians. It placed me in an anomalous position, and one day Gallio said laughingly that a friend had accused me of assisting at the secret rites and orgies of the Christians, but that he had replied I was more likely to frequent the pretty daughter of Caius. Then I remembered the daughter of Caius, a young girl of extraordinary beauty, with a perverse expression, blonde hair, and eyes like a cat, that watched every movement with a stealthy curiosity. She seemed lonely and out of place in that house of austere gravity.

“She is already famous as a beauty,” said Gallio.

“I go there on business,” I said with a smile, and willing to let him believe what he would; and, I added, after a moment’s thought: “she is charming.”

Gallio laughed, and then changed his tone quickly.

“I do not advise you to frequent that quarter of our delightful town,” he said. “It is the haunt of the worst characters in Corinth, thieves, sorcerers, and charlatans inhabit it.

Even the house of Caius is not free from suspicion ; it is said that some of our ladies go there for love-potions, or for other purposes.”

I was thinking, and did not reply to the innuendo. Gallio watched me for a moment curiously, in silence. I did not speak.

“ I have bought a little masterpiece, a painting by Parrhasios of the triumph of Bacchus. Come and see it ; it only arrived from Athens this morning.”

The next time I visited the house of Caius I spoke to Paul of what Gallio’s suspicions were ; a sullen glow filled his eyes.

“ It is no new thing,” he said ; “ on every side we are looked upon with suspicion and distrust ; we are poor, and live cheek by jowl with the evil things of life, and therefore we are also evil. The rich, and those in high places trample upon us ; yet we shall be justified.”

Pride filled him.

“ In a little time you go away to Rome, and I to Jerusalem to carry alms to the saints there, whom the Jews persecute. We are like two travellers, who have met together in an inn, and spoken of their travels ; but at dawn they separate and go their several ways.

Shall we meet again ? You are not one of us, but perchance God will lead you to us. Be humble ; put away all vain imaginings of the mind ; love all things ; suffer all things."

He gazed at me sadly for a time.

"If you would but close your eyes and put out your hand trustfully, God would lead you through the darkness. You are almost of us ; and yet you are not of us. There is a barrier which you cannot pass : you cannot believe."

Then, again, after a moment's pause.

"You must not come here again."

He rose and left me. The last time I saw that small, bald head poised upon the huge misshapen shoulder was when they were framed in the doorway ; then the curtain fell and he had gone. I sat a little while, almost sorrowful. Then a small, delicate hand was slid into mine, and I heard a soft voice whispering :

"You are going away. Take me with you."

It was the daughter of Caius, she clung to me and gazed appealingly at me out of her precocious eyes.

"Take me away with you," she repeated. "I shall do anything for you ; only take me away, take me away. I cannot stay here. It will kill me. They are so good and I am

wicked ; yes, I am very wicked. Some one told me I was beautiful, and it pleased me. I want to go with you. I am wicked. I want people to see that I am beautiful. . . .”

Serenus began to roll up his manuscript.

“ It is too dark to read the rest. But now you know the Christians. What do you think of them ? ”

“ I think as I have always thought,” said Rufus ; “ all Jews are alike. They are the enemies of the human race ; their religion is one of despair, and they do not hope to find salvation in this world. The East is the home of all credulity and superstition. Come to dinner and let us arrange to do something to-morrow. A hunt ? ”

“ What happened to the girl ? ” enquired Marcus, stretching himself slowly.

Serenus looked over the sea, toward the fishing-boats, each of which showed a light.

“ Go down to the house, both of you, and bathe. I shall follow presently. We shall dine sumptuously to-night ; and, yes, to-morrow we shall hunt. It will pass the time.”

They left him. For a little while he sat watching the lights out at sea, the spires of mist wreathing above the olives, the dance

of fire-flies over the sloping lawn. He sat motionless for some time; then he rose, and sighed.

“A little pleasure, and then darkness and silence,” he said.

He began to walk slowly toward the house. A path below him echoed with the sound of footsteps and voices; looking through the low branches he thought that he discovered in the uncertain light the figure and features of Paul, surrounded by the slaves of the household.

To MRS C. B. FAIRFAX

IV

THE JESTERS OF THE LORD

IV

THE JESTERS OF THE LORD

THE fountain rose into the sunlight singing, broke flowering a moment, and fell with a chime of sweetness into the basin. Francis looked at it with delight. The fine mist of spray drifting from it made a little rainbow in the court-yard.

“All things praise the Lord,” he said ; “but the voice of our sister the water is clearest. She never ceases from her song through the hot day, and all night she sings, from evening until dawn.”

He gazed at it with the serene pleasure of a child. In the shadow of the great curtain-wall his companions walked up and down, gesticulating, suddenly vivacious and then as suddenly mute. A little group separated from the others stood in the arch of the gateway overlooking Rome. Cool, dark cypresses showed here and there among the bell-towers

and fortifications ; and over all the broken lines of roof and belfry wandered the liquid sunlight, diversifying the colours of the tiles through a myriad gradations from dusky copper to pale gold, and ending now and again in a sudden angle of deep gloom. Yet Francis saw nothing but the water rising into the clear light.

“ Beautiful thou art, and humble, and chaste, and very precious to us,” he said. “ Of all God’s creatures thou art the most perfect, delighting in his service, praising him for the light of the sun, and the sweet air, as I praise him for thee, O sister water ! ”

He dipped his hand into the basin, and cool ripples were woven about his long, thin fingers.

“ These also are God’s creatures,” he said ; “ the shy fish who come and go mysteriously among the stems of the lilies. They move obscurely through the dim ways, and no man wonders at them ; yet none of Arthur’s knights were arrayed in such golden mail.”

And taking a piece of dry bread, which a beggar had given him, he broke it into small crumbs, and strewed them upon the surface of the water ; and the fish came out from between the stems of the lilies, and nibbled at the

crumbs as the ripples moved them ; but the crust of bread Francis ate himself, and having eaten he drank a little water out of the palm of his hand, and spoke again.

“ Little fish,” he said, “ those knights of Arthur’s court, who were mailed in glittering armour, had each one his lady, whom he served in all things ; and no one of them meddled with the lady of another, because as yet evil had not entered into their hearts ; but they went through the world succouring the afflicted, and the innocent, and the oppressed ; and doing all manner of wonderful deeds, being valiant men and strong, for the glory of God, and the great honour of the lady whose livery they wore. And the ladies, whom they served in all honourable ways, were fair and pleasant to look upon, and moreover they were well-clad, having each one her golden ornaments, and jewels, and kerchiefs of lawn, and fine cloth of Ypres ; yea ! having all things desirable about them, soft raiment, and dainty food, and wide houses full of tapestries of Arras, with a gallery for the musicians. But because of the luxury of their lives, and the folly which ever prompts the soul of man to evil, they fell into sin, and no virtue remained in them.

“ Little fish, I am a knight of God ; and I have chosen for my lady one beyond all mortal women. She hath neither fine raiment, nor gold, nor jewels ; neither a covering for her head, nor shoes for her feet ; neither land nor castles ; nay ! not so much as a shelter against the ravening beasts ; nor do her serving-men bring her delicate meats in vessels of gold and silver, nor do musicians play to her upon viols or psalteries, nor hath she any treasure hidden in the ground. She goeth from door to door, begging her bread through every city of the populous earth ; and the porters drive her from the gate with blows ; and the children mock her in the streets for being old, and lean, and ill-favoured ; and the dogs snarl at her heels. Yet all these things she endures patiently, nor complains that men revile her, for God hath put much comfort in her heart. I, also, little brother Francis, in my youth reviled her ; for it was then my pleasure to live sumptuously, to wear rich apparel, and to pass my days with music and feasting ; but when she revealed herself to me I was overcome by her exceeding great beauty, and I lamented that I had not followed after her all my days. Alas ! it is the wickedness of men that shows her as a vile and despicable thing ;

for having nothing she possesses all things. God hath clothed her with virtues more precious than rubies; he hath given her the wide earth and all the pleasant ways thereof to be her home; he hath commanded the beasts that they do her no hurt: nay! they are serviceable to her and fawn about her feet; and God himself ministers to her, feeding her as he feeds the birds of the air and the fish of the sea, and sweetening her food, so that if it be but a dry crust it savours most excellently to her, even as honey and manna in the mouth. Such is the excellence of my Lady Poverty, with whom I shall always keep faith in this life. Little fish, God hath given you the cool water to inhabit; and he hath clad you in golden mail, delightful to the eyes of men; and when all the birds and beasts and creeping things entered into the Ark, he preserved you in a safe refuge beneath the tumult of the waters: yea! of all things, which went not in with Noah, he preserved you in your multitudes though all else perished. Little fish, I praise the Lord for you, because he hath made you beautiful, and shown you infinite mercies."

But the fish, having eaten all the crumbs, swam back among the stems of the lilies,

and hung poised there in the shadowy waters, with undulating motions, waving their delicate fins, and opening and shutting their mouths. Francis considered them for a moment.

“Little fish,” he said, “perchance it is the way that you praise the Lord, being dumb and without reason; but men, to whom God hath given such excellent gifts as speech and reason, have turned from him. I would that they also might learn to praise him with great simplicity and joy in their hearts.”

He looked toward the gateway through which he saw the roofs and towers of Rome, the city which had not accepted him, inhospitable, gay, given over to the lusts of the flesh, the desire of the eyes, hungering passionately after the tangible but transient pleasures of this delightful world; a new Jerusalem, as stubborn and hard-hearted as the old, but, like that, too, a chosen city of God, in which he had elected to dwell and have his abiding place. Tears suffused his face as he looked at it lying there calm and golden in the sunlight.

“I have not known how to draw them to me,” he said. “Surely they would have followed after me if I had spoken to them more joyfully. A little thing delights them,

and they will flock to see a dancer, a juggler, a jester! We must become the jesters of God, amusing the hearts of men and leading them toward spiritual joys."

A bell struck, and was answered from all the towers of Rome, until the air pulsed with vibrations as if with a multitude of beating wings. Francis moved slowly away toward the new buildings of the Lateran. Those of his companions who were pacing up and down in the cool shadow of the wall suddenly stopped and pointed to him.

"Look! Look!" they cried.

Some play of the wind carrying the fine drifting mist over the isolated figure had clothed him for a moment in a glory of radiant colours. The sound of the bell still trembling in the air, and the sudden iridescence of spray in the sunlight, was to them a revelation. Hearing their voices raised Francis went toward them.

"What is it, my brothers?" he asked of them.

They received him almost with adoration.

"We saw you troubled, and in thought," answered Brother Egidio; "and then, suddenly, as the bells ceased, we saw a glory shine about you, and heard a great beating of wings."

But Francis remembering the doubts which had afflicted him a moment before, cast himself at the feet of Brother Egidio.

“I command you, in the name of holy obedience, that when I return you say to me: Francis, son of Pietro Bernardone, because of your doubt you are contemptible, and in no wise deserving of God’s mercy.”

Then, rising, he went toward the palace with a serene countenance.

Having watched Francis enter into the palace, the eleven companions continued to pace up and down in the cool shadow of the wall, and to discourse to each other upon grave matters.

“How is it, Brother Bernard,” said Egidio, “that astrologers are able to foretell all things that will happen to a man in his journey through life?”

“It is in this wise,” said Brother Bernard, who had all the wisdom of the schools, “the earth is the centre of the universe, which consists of a number of concentric spheres, all turning, as it were, upon the axle of the earth; the first is the sphere of the elements, which is enclosed by the sphere of the moon; beyond these, in order, circle the six spheres of Mercury, Venus, the Sun, Mars, Jupiter and

Saturn, all turning about the earth ; the next sphere is that wherein the fixed stars are set like jewels, and beyond that is the *Primum Mobile*, whence motion is born and governed. Last of all is the Empyrean, and there in a blaze of light God sits enthroned, and all the spheres make a celestial music about his feet.

“ Now it is from the order and motion of these spheres that astrologers get that devilish wisdom whereby they are enabled to foretell the future. For each one of the spheres is governed by a distinct angelical company, who influence all things under their control ; so that, having ascertained the nature of such angels as control the sphere of any particular planet, we are enabled to judge of the nature and disposition of any mortal born under their influence ; thus it happens that those who are born under Mercury are of an alert and capricious disposition, and may be given to thieving ; while those who are born under Venus are lewd and wanton in their motions, given over to the lusts of the flesh ; and those influenced by Mars will be great warriors, men of mettle, hot-tempered, and quick to shed blood. Moreover, by the conjunctions and opposition of planets, by comets and portents in the sky, those skilled in the signs are even

able to foretell whether a man shall die in his youth with all his sins heavy upon him, or in old age when his flagging pulses have made him less prone to sin and warned him to repentance ; and we may see men, to whom astrologers have predicted a long life, pursuing a course of infamy well on into their old age, for they know that there is time left for repentance, whereby they may yet save their souls. Such is the lamentable wisdom, which came to us through the transgression of Adam."

They continued in silence a little way, pondering these things ; and then Bernard spoke again.

" In all things," he said, " we may read the infinite mercies and wisdom of God. For even as he has made the earth the centre of the universe, so he has made man the centre of all created things. Round the throne of God are the Seraphim and Cherubim singing His eternal praise, and next to them are the Thrones, who carry the orders of God unto the Dominations. These last are the mighty powers who held back the sun and moon in their courses, at the prayer of Joshua ; and they inhabit the *Primum Mobile*, whence all the planets are moved from east to west.

Beneath these, are the Virtues and Powers, ruling the planetary spheres ; and finally come the three orders of Prinedoms, Archangels, and Angels ; and to each Angel is given the guidance of one soul. Now in this order I have followed the teaching of Dionysius rather than of Gregory, since the former was the pupil of St Paul, and therefore of greater authority.

“ Many rebellious angels, driven out with Lucifer, and the host who writhe in Hell beneath our feet, making the earth tremble, inhabit the sphere of the elements, and ride upon all storms, ruling the thunder and lightning, and opening the flood-gates, and loosening the tempests of hail ; and God hath given them power over the wicked to lead them to destruction, but, before the prayers of the holy, their power is only an empty noise. How little is the worth of man ! Yet all these immortal spirits are concerned in his salvation. And God hath set Jerusalem in the centre of earth’s habitable hemisphere, so that from there the means of salvation might radiate into all countries, and gather up all peoples. And yet again is man the centre of created things, for God hath made him lord and master of the earth, and of all the birds

and beasts therein ; though, indeed, when he fell from Paradise in the person of Adam, he decreased in excellence and became subject to sin and death."

"And for how long a time," enquired one of the younger brethren, "was Adam in Paradise ?"

"For little more than six hours," answered Bernard, with assurance.

"It was a very short time," said the brother simply.

But Egidio was troubled ; he touched Bernard upon the arm.

"Beware, little sheep of the Lord," he said gently, "lest thy great learning make thee mad, and turn to pride in thy heart."

II

As the Cardinal Giovanni di San Paolo entered the audience, the Pope was dictating a letter to his secretary. He spoke in a low, clear voice, so clear that it was audible at the end of the long room.

"Among all the princes of the earth," said Innocent, "we have always cherished with a particular affection your own person ; and the

more so since the kingdom which you have inherited is, by the will of your predecessors, subject and tributary to the Roman Church. Therefore redeem the promise of your father liberally and without delay. Your eternal salvation will be the better assured, and there will be added to it even such temporal benefits as the apostolic protection is able to secure. In acting otherwise you would offend the Creator. He chastiseth those who do evil unto his Church, but more particularly those who detain unjustly the wealth of St Peter."

He motioned the Cardinal toward him, and taking half a lemon squeezed it into a cup and drank it. He had a youthful but rather fleshy face, at once legal and military in its character. The features were fine, with a distinctly Roman nobility: a long narrow nose, almost straight except where it jutted slightly from the brows; fine lustrous eyes, set a little too close together; a small mouth, with thin, rather drooping lips, and a double chin. The well-chiselled nostrils dilated sensitively from time to time, otherwise the whole face was calm, impassive, hieratic. He began, without any prelude, to speak to the Cardinal of their business.

“I have spoken to many of the cardinals about these penitents of Assisi. Their opinion is that the rule is too severe, and such an ideal beyond all human strength.”

“Your Holiness, I have also urged this view upon Francis, but, in the simplicity of his heart, he replies that his rule is taken from the Gospels: ‘If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and follow me. Take nothing for your journey, neither staff, nor scrip, nor shoes, nor money. If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow me.’ They have vowed to follow this ideal of evangelical perfection. How can we withstand them before the world ?”

“My heart has been moved towards them,” answered Innocent. “I do not mistrust their piety, nor doubt the grace by which God has confirmed them in their design. They may be steadfast until their death; whereas others coming after may relax the rule, and their weakness become a fable in the world.”

“I doubt not that the rule will be relaxed,” answered the Cardinal; “their aim is too vague, too ideal in many ways: complete poverty, complete obedience, and the preaching of these virtues. And yet, Holy Father, I have been

drawn to these men. By them I feel that many souls shall be led to God."

"You believe that the rule will be relaxed ; and yet you say that we cannot modify this rule because it consists of definite precepts taken from the Gospels ?"

"Your Holiness," replied the Cardinal, "if we say that it is impossible for a man to follow the precepts of Christ, we blaspheme. Time modifies all things ; and in the meanwhile these men will draw unto themselves a great deal of popular sentiment. They are willing to give us the most absolute obedience, to be our servants in all things, provided we approve their desire to live according to the standard of evangelical perfection. Surely we should approve their piety."

"Similar efforts have failed," answered Innocent. "It is two years since I approved the mission of Durando d'Huesca, and for those two years the bishops have not ceased to complain of his followers. This fraternity has a similar constitution. Both confess the Catholic faith ; both desire to give all they have to the poor, to live themselves in poverty without care for the morrow, having nothing but their daily bread and a cloak ; both are open to receive lay members among them."

“The difference is in the spirit of their founders. Francis is a poet,” answered the Cardinal. “He is a troubadour, a vagrant minstrel, whose lady is Poverty. His speech is serene, gay, charming. He knows how to seize upon simple incidents of daily life, and use them as parables, so that the poor and humble can understand; and all his teaching is full of a lyrical emotion that is penetrated with the love of all things. He burns with the love of God, and this divine flame is so strong in him that it enlightens all the world. There is nothing about him, no bird, beast, fish, or tree, which does not seem to him a part of the choir of God, praising the Lord, and existing entirely for that praise. Beyond these things he is a true son of the Church. These penitents, Holy Father, are so simple: they have faith in some spark of divinity hidden in the soul of man which may be awakened by a breath; they believe that man can be made to see the beauty of holiness, and that once he has grasped and recognised this beauty, as a thing existing in the world about him, he will follow no more after the beauties of fleshly desires. He bears the mockery of those who think him mad with so much patience that they become

ashamed. His simplicity draws folk to him."

"All these things are indeed admirable," said Innocent in his clear, low speech; "but alas! how often have the most beautiful ideals led men into abominable heresies and destroyed the peace of the Church. Would that his dream might be realised, and that all men might seek their salvation through poverty and obedience. But to us, most Reverend Father, in our character as Supreme Pontiff, there are many responsibilities. We also, if we might choose, would choose the one thing necessary; Mary's unbounded loving adoration, in preference to Martha's many cares. Yet we are content. The divine wisdom hath shown us that here also salvation may be gained. We accept our office with humility, content to be the servant of the servants of God. Our function is an ungrateful one, to watch over the welfare of our flock, and guard them not only from their enemies but from themselves. Saintly men have been the cause of mischief in others, and even the greatest heretics have been men of holy lives. It behoves us, therefore, to keep a strict and unceasing watch upon all doctrines taught to the faithful. We cannot tolerate

the teaching and exposition of the Gospels by a preaching fraternity partly composed of lay members. We cannot tolerate any action independent of the bishops. We must insist that each brother receive the tonsure, and that they choose one from among themselves who will be responsible to us; and also, that none shall preach or direct any mission without the consent of the bishop. Yet even now I am doubtful. Perchance this man may be discouraged. It would be better if they entered some existing Order."

He paused, drank a little more lemon, and looked keenly at the Cardinal.

"Bring him to me," he said.

The Cardinal, having led Francis into the room, stood apart in the embrasure of a window overlooking the courtyard. Innocent fixed his eyes steadily upon the little poor man of Assisi. Even at their first meeting he had been struck by the youthful, almost childish figure, the small, round head, and the pallor of the lean face, illuminated with its large patient eyes. It was like watching a timid wild thing approaching him. Francis walked with slow, hesitating steps. His knees and fingers were trembling, his eyes shone with tears, his face was paler than

usual, but a smile wavered upon it. He did not come in fear, but shaken with an emotion that was partly hope and partly doubt. He looked toward the seated figure in the chair, wearing a high tiara of damascened white cloth rising above a simple pointed crown, and a white pallium with red crosses. He hoped for some sign, but the Pope remained inflexible, his hands laid upon his knees, his eyes motionless, a figure of impenetrable reserve; and Francis could find no word to say. At last he knelt, still trembling, with the tears streaming from his eyes. The Cardinal moved in the window; and the slight noise seemed for a moment to give Francis confidence.

“Father Pope,” he began simply; but he could say no more.

“My son,” said Innocent at last, moved by the suffering eyes, “why have you come to us again?”

“Father Pope,” answered Francis in a sweet, almost shrill voice, “when you sent me from you, you did not bid me not to come again.”

He smiled as he spoke, very simply, winningly, a smile that was almost a caress. Some hint of softening in the eyes of the Pope gave him more confidence.

“Most Holy Father,” he began again, “I have come to you once more, because you have not yet granted my request. You are a great person, whom God has exalted above all men, and I think that perhaps you had not time to listen to me, who am the meanest of God’s creatures; so that you did not understand the excellence of that life which the Lord hath commanded us to follow. Or perchance it was that the Lord wished to try my faith, and, lest I was over-confident in myself, to show me that without his will I am capable of nothing, and to humiliate my pride. Father Pope, I think this last is the true reason: for how could you not see the excellence of the way God hath chosen for us, which is a pattern of the way the disciples themselves followed?”

And the Pope, having no answer to this candour, sat immobile.

“It is a little thing that we ask of you,” continued Francis; “only that you should approve of our vow to follow a life like that which the disciples led on the shores of the Lake of Galilee.”

“My son,” said Innocent, “search well your heart. Is it not pride which makes you think that God hath chosen you for this work?”

And Francis lowered his head until it touched the floor.

“Why,” continued Innocent, “should God have chosen you among the multitudes of men?”

And Francis raised his head again.

“God looked down upon this earth,” he answered humbly, “and he explored all the ways thereof, and searched into all the souls of men. And in the whole earth he found no man so poor in mind, so mean of stature, so foul with sins, so weak and utterly worthless, as Francis, the son of Pietro Bernardone; and for that reason he hath chosen me. For if folk see that one so miserable as I am can be uplifted by the grace of God, they will hope again for themselves; and many who are caught in the snares of Satan and despair of their salvation will be freed by this means.”

“Is it not pride, my son,” the Pope asked of him after a pause, “that hinders you from accepting the modifications which I suggest in your rule?”

“I shall reason with you,” answered Francis; “tell me one.”

“That you should not be entirely without possessions, without a little money.”

“Father Pope,” answered Francis sweetly, “if we were possessed of even the meanest things, we should have to protect them; and if we had but a few pence in our scrips there are those so poor that they would covet them and desire to steal them; and if a man come with arms to rob us, should we oppose violence with violence? Yea, and having a little we shall not have enough, but each one will seek to have more than his brother, and so shall discord and dissension grow among us. And how, having sufficient, shall we go among those who have nothing and say to them: ‘Brothers, be not cast down, for the wealth of this world is but dust and ashes. Seek not after it, but praise God for what he hath given you; life, and this pleasant earth, the song of birds, freedom from care, death, and a treasure in the skies’? Will they not mock at us? Or how shall we go among thieves, hiding our gold in our bosoms, and saying to them: ‘Brothers, do not so wickedly, that which ye steal is but dross, earth digged out of earth; but holiness is fine gold.’ Will they not mock at us, saying, ‘Holiness is possible with a full belly’? Father Pope, having no treasure to guard, we shall have no care; and those among whom we shall go

will not lay violent hands upon us, as thieves and impostors."

The Pope hesitated.

"Will ye live by mendicancy alone? Will no idlers come in with you?"

"Nay," said Francis, "no man shall be idle. Each one shall work, and their wage will be their daily bread."

He spoke no more, but knelt, waiting. Innocent had moved. He leant forward a little, with bent head and knitted brows, looking fixedly at the curious figure, with the head of a young faun, kneeling before him in a coarse stuff cloak, girt with a rope like a halter. He could not fathom that serene soul. At last he leaned back in his chair.

"My son," he said, in a gentler voice, "our task is hard. We have the care and oversight of the whole Church, and all our vigilance is directed to keeping the holy faith, as it has been handed down to us, one, pure, and universal. My son, God hath poured his grace upon you, and distinguished you with gifts of holiness. I am not worthy, there is none less worthy than I, of the charge God has confided to me. Pray for me, that I may be enlightened. On every side the Church is being menaced: by subtle and dangerous enemies without, and by

schisms and heresies within. Therefore it is necessary for me to avoid the multiplication of new fraternities, however sacred and inspired with true zeal they may be ; for each, through the peculiarity of their nature, and their particular devotion to one aspect of the religious life, is liable to be cut off from the main body of Holy Church ; nay, even to become an hindrance, an annoyance, a little sect separated from the communion of the faithful. For all these reasons I can only advise you, as I have before, to join some existing Order."

Francis rose from his knees. He had a sense of being crushed by a cruel and superior force. His eyes were dry ; but he saw nothing. He turned and moved slowly toward the door. Innocent made a sudden gesture of disappointment. Francis took a few more steps, hesitated, and then turned.

"Father Pope," he said, "there was once in the desert a woman, very poor but beautiful. A great king seeing her beauty desired to take her to wife, that by her he might have beautiful children. So it was done ; and many children were born to him. And when the children were grown up, their mother spoke to them, saying: 'My children, you have no reason to be ashamed, for you are the sons of the

king ; go, therefore, to his court, and he will give you all things that are necessary to you.' And when they had arrived, the king admired their beauty, and finding in them his own likeness, he spoke to them, saying : ' Whose sons are ye ? ' And when they had answered that they were the sons of a poor woman dwelling in the desert, the king embraced them with great joy, crying : ' Fear not, because you are mine own sons. If strangers eat at my table, shall I turn away those who are my lawful children ? ' And the king commanded the woman that she should send him all the sons whom she had borne, in order that he might care for them."

He paused for a moment, and then continued :

" I am, Holy Father, that poor woman, whom God in his love has deigned to make beautiful, and by whom it has pleased him to have lawful children. The King of kings has told me that he will nourish all the children he has by me, for if he nourishes bastards, how much more should he nourish his lawful children ? "

He spoke the last words vehemently, standing rigid before Innocent, with blazing eyes ;

and the Pope sat immobile, watching him with inscrutable calm.

“My son, come here,” said Innocent at last.

The Cardinal turned from the window, and looked from one to another with equal interest. He was a worldly man, and the mere contact with the world had been sufficient to make him more human than the Pope: unconsciously, disinterestedly, he was summing up the characters of the two men before him. The fact that he was inferior to both fitted him to judge them, made him swift to see the flaws and defects in their diverse characters: Innocent’s hard legalism and military instincts; the blithe and elusive spirituality of Francis, a nature free as air, too diverse, too liquid, too impracticable and fleeting, to have any but a momentary effect. He smiled at the comedy; it was no more to him. Behind his cynicism was a kind of tolerance, a charitable irony, a contemptuous love. The fact that both these men recognised an ideal, and denied the manifold pleasures of life to follow after it, baffled and perplexed him. That ironical attitude from which, within himself, he considered them, was the tribute which small imaginations pay to the great. He was content to be a spectator, and was willingly

amused by the readiness with which each of these men detected the weak spot in the other, while remaining blind to his own.

Innocent stretched out his hand to Francis and drew him toward the chair. Francis knelt.

“My son, let us try to understand one another,” said the Pope amicably, as he laid his hand on the other’s head. “How is it possible for us to avoid seeing in thy courage and perseverance the directing hand of God? Be assured that we have been moved solely by our desire to work for the good of the Church, and the welfare of those who follow thee. We would not have thee depart from us with bitterness in thy heart. Listen, therefore, and be content with what we propose. Is not one condition of thy rule obedience?”

“We shall be obedient to you in all things, save in any abrogation of the rule, for that way was shown to us by the mercy of Christ himself.”

“Thou dost yet mistrust us,” said the Pope, smiling. “Know, then, that thou hast our permission to follow that way of life which has been revealed to you, to practise poverty and the evangelical virtues. Art thou content?”

“Yea, I am content,” answered Francis, with a radiant face.

“But,” continued Innocent, checking him; “and herein thou shalt show thy filial obedience to us: thou and thy companions shall receive the tonsure at the hands of the Cardinal Giovanni di San Paolo, so that henceforth ye may be identified with the Church; and, secondly, ye shall choose one from among you who shall be responsible to us for all; and, thirdly, in whatsoever place ye may be, ye shall be subject unto the bishop, yielding him the most implicit obedience, and in no wise seeking to preach without his leave. Art thou content?”

“Yea, I am content,” answered Francis, “so that you approve our rule.”

“We give thee permission to follow the rule, and to preach to the people,” said the Pope clearly, “and if thy fraternity becomes great, and many flock to you, then thou shalt come to us again, and we shall formally approve thine Order. Meanwhile thou hast the permission. Pray for me, my son, that the Lord may reveal to me the way of righteousness. Most Reverend Father, let my secretary be summoned.”

As the Cardinal led Francis from the

audience, the Pope watched them. He sat for some time in thought. The secretary entered, and sitting at the table began to sharpen a new pen. Then Innocent lifted his head. He dismissed Francis from his mind as completely as if the little poor man had never existed, and concerned himself with the question of the heretical Albigeois, and the case of Count Raymond of Toulouse. The Count had on a previous occasion objected to the appointment, as legate, of the Abbot of Citeaux, who was notoriously his enemy; and it was now the business of the Pope to console the powerful Abbot for the fact that he could not be the direct representative of the Holy See at the Count's approaching trial, nor in the final settlement of the whole question of the Albigeois; and for the appointment in his room of Maître Thédise. He was careful to point out that Thédise was not a legate, but a mere delegate of the Church.

“He shall merely execute thy prescriptions,” he dictated in his low, clear voice. “He shall be thy tool, thy voice, the bait which covers the hook of thy sagacity. Raymond is like a sick man, for whom a kindly physician will help to sweeten the bitterness of his medicine;

he would take thy remedy more patiently from the hands of another."

And the secretary's quill scratched busily over the fine parchment.

When the companions of Francis saw him returning to them, they ran to meet him, and seeing from afar the joy that shone upon his face, they were glad and gave thanks to God. And when he had come up to them and told them the conditions which he had agreed to with the Pope, with one voice they chose him for their head, and kneeling before him made a vow of obedience. And brother Egidio suddenly remembered the command and duty which Francis had laid upon him, and he rose.

"Francis, son of Pietro Bernardone," he said, "because of thy doubt thou art contemptible and in no wise worthy of God's mercy."

"It is true," said Francis, kneeling before him, and thanking him. Then in a group they left the courtyard, he in the middle and the others surrounding him, and presently one heard no sound but that of the fountain singing in the sunlight.

III

It was with joy that Francis and his companions left Rome. As soon as they had received the tonsure, and prayed together at the shrine of the Apostles, they set out northward by the Porta Salaria, taking nothing for the journey, neither staff, nor scrip, nor shoes, nor any money; but trusting all things to God, whose children they were. At first they passed little farms and inns, and in the distance saw a few flocks and shepherds moving slowly over the plains; but in a little while the houses became rare, and the only sounds were from the larks in the skies. They had drawn their cowls over their heads to protect them from the fierce sun, and the dust rising from their feet covered them with a fine grey powder. But in the gaiety of their hearts they felt none of these things, but were quickened with the joy of their triumph, quickened also with the sense that they were returning homeward, to the hills of Assisi and the sweet air of their fields. Their eyes followed the larks into the skies, and they felt that their own souls sang like that above the earth.

“Praised be thou, O Lord, for our brothers the larks,” said Francis; “at dawn they sing to thee, and at noon and at eve; their blithe singing gladdens the heart of man.”

Yet in that vast silence the voices of the larks seemed thin and small. There was no motion in the air except the trembling of the heat, and the straight road they followed stretched far away into the distance.

“Where shall we sleep to-night?” said Giovanni.

“Where God wills,” answered Francis. “Our brother the body is a cell, and the soul is a monk inhabiting it.”

Their faces were thick with dust, and the sweat from their brows traced runnels in it; their lips were parched, and their eyes ached from the dazzling light. On all sides lay the great plains, and no trees rose out of them.

“I thirst,” said Angelo.

“Perhaps we shall pass a little stream,” answered Francis. “Be not cast down. At evening we shall look back on all that we have suffered for our Lady Poverty, and we shall be glad. It will rejoice us that we have been tried, and have not been found unworthy.”

Yet the sun had not declined much from

the zenith, and it was long until the evening. Their feet dragged wearily.

“God hath forsaken us,” said Giovanni.

“Cast that thought from thee, my brother,” said Francis. “Though we perish here in this desert place, God hath not forsaken us. Shall we faint at a little suffering, we who were proud at dawn? Surely we should suffer a little for his sake, who suffered so much for ours.”

But they had grown feverish with the heat; they gasped and sobbed, swaying like drunken men, muttering as if in a delirium; and a great fear covered Francis, as he watched them.

“My God,” he prayed silently, yet moving his parched lips, “if I have done anything accounted worthy in thy sight, grant that I may suffer for these. Let us not perish utterly.”

They sank down one by one beside the dusty road, and the fierce heat streamed down on them: one or two muttered, but most of them lay still.

“My God, why hast thou deserted me?” prayed Francis in a broken voice.

And Egidio, lying delirious upon the ground, looked at him with glazed, unrecognising eyes, and muttered to him:

“Francis, son of Pietro Bernardone, because

of thy doubt thou art contemptible, and in no wise worthy of the mercy of God."

And Francis covered his face with his hands, and lay beside his companions.

"If it be thy will, my Lord ; if it be thy will."

He felt water sprinkled on his face, and a little wine poured between his lips.

"Who are you who travel in this wise, through the fierce heat, without food or drink, and half naked ? If I had not seen you, and come to your aid, you would have perished by the wayside."

The bottle was thrust between his lips again, and he swallowed a good draught ; as he swum back into consciousness, he heard the voice of Egidio :

"We are penitents from Assisi, who have been to Rome that the Pope might approve our rule, and we were returning homeward when the fierce heat struck us down."

"From Rome," said the deep mellow voice. "Then you have been travelling on foot through the hot noon. It is wonderful that you got so far. But for my wine you would have lain there till the end of time. Art thou stronger ?"

The last words were to Francis, who had opened his eyes.

"Yea. Thanks to thee," answered Francis. "God will reward thee, my brother."

"Doubtless," answered the other. "But who is to pay me for my wine? You be twelve fools, without a wise man among you."

Francis looking about him saw that most of his companions were sitting up eating bread, and looking at him stupidly. All were sick and weary. The stranger who had helped them was a tall young man driving a hooded wine-cart. He had a plump, handsome face, magnificent limbs, and a general air of well-being.

"None of us can pay thee," answered Francis, "nay, not even for thy wine, which was the least part of thy kindness. Shall we pay thee for our lives with our lives? We have given them to God."

"I want no payment," said the young man, ashamed. "See, I shall leave you this other small flask of wine. It hath grown cooler; the sun is sinking, and an hour will bring you to Orte. Yea, indeed I see that you are saintly livers, yet I have called you fools."

"It is right that you should call us fools,

my brother," answered Francis. "We are sinful men, who follow the way which God hath shown us, and have no wisdom in worldly things. We are fools for Christ's sake. Yea, we are the fools of God, and by our folly seek to draw men toward him. But thy kindness and mercy shown to us, my brother, is a good deed, which like a seed thrown in the ground shall flourish and bear fruit. Yea, though thou seest it not. And when thou goest before God at the last, he will take two apples out of his robe, an apple of gold and an apple of silver, and he will speak to thee, saying: 'Lo, here is thy payment for that thou hast succoured my children on earth; these be the fruit of the seed which thou then plantedst.'"

But the young man blushed shamefully.

"Suffer me now to go," he said. "Thou hast made me ashamed. Yet if thou shouldst pray for me, pray also for my beloved, who is called Vanna."

He climbed into his cart, and continued on the way they had come, the bells tinkling upon his mule. And after a little time, when they were rested, they went their own way, with great weariness of body and in silence because they were still dazed and giddy. But

coming to Orte, they entered into an ancient ruined tomb, where they determined to abide for that night, and some peasants gave them enough food. Then sitting in the starlight, they praised God for his mercy.

“Surely,” said Francis, “he who succoured us was an angel sent from God, for how else could we have been rescued from death?”

And they marvelled that they had not known him for an angel, and with great joy they praised God.

“They were twelve fools,” said the young man to Vanna; “but for me they would have perished by the roadside.”

“God was good to them,” she answered simply; and again he was ashamed.

To LAURENCE BINYON

V

AT SAN CASCIANO

V

AT SAN CASCIANO

TAKING a pen from the table, he mended it to his own fashion, and wrote :

“ Thomas Cromwell to his most excellent friend, Master William Bates, greeting. I am removed to the farmhouse of La Strada at San Casciano for a short time, having left Florence on account of the great heat and an indisposition of my stomach, caused by a surfeit of raw ham and figs: for it is the custom of this people, when the figs ripen, to make an excursion to their villas, or the farms of their tenants, and having brought with them a number of small hams, smoked and excellently well flavoured, which they cut into thin slices, they sit in the shade of a fig-tree, and make a great feasting. Messer Frescobaldi carried me to such a feast at one of his neighbouring villas, and I, whether from the novelty of the dish, which savours

deliciously, and is exciting to the palate, or from a natural intemperance of appetite, having eaten immoderately of figs and ham, and having drunk a vast quantity of wine, was seized on my return to Florence with violent pains and cramps in the stomach, accompanied by much retching and colic. Messer Frescobaldi, having sent for his physician to come to me, I was bled eight ounces, and am now somewhat recovered, though in much need of rest, and the coolness of the country air.

“ But since I am charged with the execution of your business rather than with the recreation of mine own health, let me say that the matter of the Lucca merchants is settled, on the terms mentioned in the enclosed treaty, and such produce as you require will be sent as occasion offers, whether by France or Antwerp, depending upon the state of the rival nations; but in so far as is possible the goods will be shipped at Genoa by the Fuggers, and carried thence to Antwerp, to be reladed at your own charge, and carried to your brother at Boston, or on a ship of the Fuggers’ trading with England, in which case they will be delivered to yourself at the sign of the Blue Anchor, in Chepeside.

The late ordinances directing that all shrouds shall be made of woollen, and forbidding the export of raw wool out of England, and the question of the staple, have caused much ill-feeling against English merchants, both at Antwerp and Florence; wherefore I think it would be wise to commission the Fuggers to buy for you, and to colour your goods with their name, more especially in the Baltic trade. The same offices will, at your request, be undertaken by Messer Frescobaldi here and throughout Italy, both with the cloth merchants of Florence and the glass workers and silk merchants of Venice; but, in matters connected with your trade with the latter town, Messer Frescobaldi demands that you place a sum of money in his bank, sufficient to cover the charges of the import and the export duty, or, that such moneys as he may advance on your behalf for the payment of these imposts be charged against you at one and a half per cent. above the current rate, so that in the one case he hath the use of your money, and in the other a large interest upon his own. You will easily see by the treaty that I have relinquished to him rather the shadow than the substance of what he desired; but I do feel it my duty to

beseech you that in every wise you show him such convenience and fair dealing as you may, without hurt to your own prosperity, since by your acting in this fashion he will be the less likely to repudiate the contract as a cheat devised for his beguiling.

“Returning to mine own affairs. I am the guest of one Niccolo Machiavelli, an honest and courteous man, with much wit, and knowledge of the ancients. He was sometime in the service of the late Republic, but was after suspected, and removed from his office by the Medici faction. Having been racked on a false charge of treason, he retired hither, and by a frugal expenditure hath somewhat mended his fortune, so that he is embarrassed neither by the cares of wealth, nor the vexations of poverty. At first, however, since a republican and popular government considers all the citizens to be its servants, as much through their own duty as from any hope of a fair remuneration, he, having been able to save little of his pay, was in great straits, so that he was forced to rise ere it was light, and spread nets for thrushes and quails, superintend his idle workmen, and busy himself with a thousand trifling cares: wherefore I think it more profitable

to serve a tyrant than a free people. He hath now acquired by his own efforts that leisure which his public service and former poverty denied him, so that he can pass his day in pleasant discourse, studying the diverse manners and habits of men, or reading in his library, in which he doth greatly delight. The library itself, in which I am now writing, is a long, airy room, having a pleasant aspect toward the south-west ; but it overlooks the courtyard, and one is continually disturbed through the day by the foolish cackle of hens and other farmyard racket. He told me that he chose the room on his first coming hither, whereat his wife made a great clamour complaining that he had taken for his own uses the one serviceable room in the house, which is indeed the truth. She is well looking and I would willingly see more of her ; but she is a notable woman, and, as is usual with her sex, occupied all day long by a thousand nothings, whereat I think he is marvellously contented, esteeming himself fortunate in that she differs from the majority of wives, who continually invade the privacy of men, and use our apartments as their own. Set against the walls are great chests of carven and painted wood, which

contain his manuscripts and printed books, the Latin poets as well as the historians and orators, besides those Italian authors who have gained an eternity of fame, more especially Dante Alighieri and Petrarch. Here, among this choice store of what the world hath accounted noble in thought or action, we sit far into the night with a flagon of wine between us, and such entertainment as our own wits provide, relishing in our conversation both the *sal nigrum* of Momus, and the *sal candidum* which Mercurius gave.

“At first, seeing the ingenious and subtle mind of my friend, I was at a loss to account for his apparent failure in assuring his own fortune ; but, knowing him better, I see that his judgment, never at fault in dealing with things afar off, may be perplexed and misled when it comes to bear upon present affairs ; being so great in himself he doth sometimes forget of what poor account in Europe are his countrymen to-day. He is at present making a series of discourses upon politics, which he reads in the gardens of Cosimo Rucellai, where the meetings of the Academy are held. It was at one of these meetings, after the company had dispersed, that I first had speech of him ; in which traverses, though the chief

subject of his discourse is Livy's history of the Roman Republic, he draweth his examples from many sources, and showeth how mankind hath always been prone to the same faults, and in like circumstances will always act in a like manner without regard for the lessons and warnings of the past.

“In the intervals of preparing these discourses against their occasions, and of refining those which he hath read, he giveth much time and labour to the polishing of a little treatise or manual for princes ; a work full of seasonable matter, which I have read with much profit and agreement, for he reasons not, as the schoolmen use, from some abstract theory of the universe, with which all events must be forced into harmony, but gathering together the facts of common experience, he derives from the perfect understanding of them the principles of his philosophy ; wherefore I say that he hath invented a new science, and added a tenth muse to the choir of Apollo. And to show you the satiric nature of the man, I must tell you, that having dedicated his treatise of *The Prince* to Lorenzo di Piero de' Medici, in the hope of some advancement and reward, and being disappointed of this hope, in the dedication of his *Discourses* to Zanobi Buondelmonte

and Cosimo Rucellai he says, ‘Though I have been mistaken on many occasions, yet certainly I have made no error in offering my *Discourses* to you. For in this I think to have shown some gratitude for benefits received, and to have abandoned the path habitually trodden by those who make a trade of writing, and whose custom it is to dedicate their works to some prince, to whom, in the blindness of their ambition or of their avarice, and in the pouring out of their empty flatteries, they attribute all the virtues, instead of making him blush for his vices. To avoid falling into that vulgar fault I have made choice, not indeed of a prince, but of those who merit to be princes. . . . Moreover, historians give greater praise to Hieron, a plain citizen of Syracuse, than to Perseus, King of Macedonia, for Hieron lacked none of the qualities of kingliness, except the name, while Perseus had no other than the kingdom.’ So doth he think to repay them for their neglect.

“This satiric quality doth characterise all his writing, whether he be dealing with the sacred or the profane; indeed he doth make no difference between the books of Moses and the books of Livy, but treats both in the same way, as the record of past events; and

though God forbid that I should seem to doubt the truth of Scripture, yet it is my opinion that the writings of Moses are not to be apprehended by the plain man, being full of mystery and divinity, which only a clerk can expound. Thus, in one place, after enumerating the great law-givers of old ; Moses, Cyrus, Romulus, Theseus, and the like, he adds : ‘ And though perhaps I ought not to name Moses, he being merely an instrument for carrying out the divine commands, he is still to be admired for those qualities which made him worthy to converse with God ; but if we consider Cyrus and the others who have acquired or founded kingdoms, they will all be seen to be admirable, and if their actions and the particular institutions of which they were the authors be studied, they will be found not to differ from those of Moses, though he was instructed by so great a teacher.’

“ This is either too simple, or too subtile, for men of godly and pious dispositions. Indeed, I think that by indulging his delight in irony he hath made himself distrusted ; for the depravity of human nature is such, that, where two interpretations can be put upon words, mankind will ordinarily choose the sense which

is evil instead of that which is good. Witness the following, on ecclesiastical princedoms: 'All the difficulties of ecclesiastical princedoms precede their acquisition: for they are acquired by merit or good fortune, but are maintained without either, being upheld by the venerable ordinances of religion, which are all of such a nature and efficacy that they secure the authority of their princes in whatever way they may act or live. These princes alone have territories which they do not defend, and subjects whom they do not govern; yet, though undefended, their territories are not taken from them, nor are their subjects concerned at not being governed or led to think of throwing off their allegiance; nor is it in their power to do so. Accordingly these princedoms alone are secure and happy. But inasmuch as they are sustained by agencies of a higher nature than the mind of man can reach, I forbear to speak of them; for, since they are set up and supported by God himself, he would be a rash and presumptuous man who should venture to discuss them.' It hath a double edge, and though some may be found to declare the intention innocent, since the book is addressed to a relative of the Pope, I would rather infer from that the greater daring

of the author. But lest you yourself, who are curious in such matters, should doubt whether the intention be malicious or innocent, I shall explain further his opinions, both in the matter of Moses, and in the matter of ecclesiastical princedoms. For in two discourses at the Rucellai gardens, at which I was present, he returned to these subjects, and said : ' In fact no legislator has ever given his people a new body of laws, without alleging the intervention of the divinity ; for otherwise they would not have been accepted. It is certain that there exist many benefits of which a wise and prudent man foresees the consequences, but nevertheless of which the evidence is not sufficiently striking to convince all minds. To resolve that difficulty the wise man hath recourse to the gods. . . . The Florentines believe themselves to be neither ignorant nor rude, and, nevertheless, Fra Girolamo Savonarola made them believe that he had conversations with God. I do not pretend to decide if he were right or wrong, for one should not speak without respect of so extraordinary a man. I only say, that a great multitude of people believed him, without having seen anything supernatural which could justify their belief ; but his whole life,

his knowledge, and the subject of his discourses, should have been enough to make them give credence to his words. One must never be astonished at having failed to-day, where others once succeeded; for mankind, as I have said in my preface, are born, live, and die, according to the same laws.'

"And if you, Master Bates, would ask me how it is possible that such matters should be so spoken of, openly, in this country, which licence would not be permitted elsewhere, I shall offer in reply his own words on ecclesiastical princedoms. For he says: 'Certainly, if religion had been able to maintain itself as a Christian republic, such as its divine founder had established, the States which professed it would have been happier than they are now. But how is she fallen! and the most striking proof of her decadence is to see that the peoples bordering on the Church of Rome, that capital of our religion, are precisely the least religious. If one examines the primitive spirit of her institutions, and when he sees how far her practice hath departed from them, he might easily believe that we are approaching a time of ruin or of retribution. And, since some assert that the happiness of Italy depends on the Church of Rome, I should

bring against that Church several reasons which offer themselves to my mind, among which there are two extremely grave, and which I think, cannot be denied. First, the evil examples of the court of Rome have extinguished in this country all devotion and all religion, which fact carries in its train innumerable inconveniences and disorders ; and as, wherever religion reigns one must believe the existence of good, so wherever it hath disappeared one must suppose the presence of evil. We owe it then, we other Italians, to the Church and to the priests that we are without religion or morals, but we owe them one other obligation, which is the source of our ruin ; it is that the Church has always stirred up, and stirs up incessantly, the division of this unhappy country.'

"My mind doth see you, sitting, perchance, in your garden, by the dial, as is your wont after the business of the day is over, and mocking me, that I have found a new prophet. But, indeed, it doth seem so to me, and I am content to sit in his company gleaning the ripe ears of his wisdom. And if I have out-wearied your patience with my praise of him, whose every word hath the force of a deed, let me remind you of a summer day in the

garden of your old house at Boston, how we plucked the apricocks from the espaliers, while you read to me the discourses of Sir Thomas More upon Augustine's *De Civitate Dei*, when, if I did not gape, it was but from politeness and my great respect for yourself. For this man doth stand among his countrymen like a giant in a city of pygmies, overlooking their petty disputation, and reading the future from the mirror of the past. He doth foresee the ruin of the Church, the birth of Empires, the dawn of a new greatness for the world, the emancipation of the peoples from the ecclesiastical tyranny of to-day. He standeth like one prophetic upon Pisgah. He doth see that the world must be freed from this pestilence of monks. He says: 'Our religion, having shown us the truth and the only way of salvation, hath lessened in our eyes the worth of worldly honours. . . . The ancient religions offered divine honours only to those illustrious with worldly glory, such as famous captains, and leaders of the Republic; our religion, on the contrary, only sanctifies the humble, and men given to contemplation rather than to an active life; she hath placed the *summum bonum* in humility, in the contempt for worldly things, and even in abjec-

tion; while the pagans made it consist in greatness of soul, in bodily strength, and in all that might help to make men brave and robust. And if our religion asks us to have strength, it is rather the strength to suffer evils than to do great things. It seems that this new morality has made mankind weaker, and given the world over as a prey to the wicked.'

"All these sayings have sunk deep into my mind, as you may well perceive by the length of this letter. He hath taught me that, since the conditions of life are always the same, a man who hath strength and wit may rise to the same eminence in these days as the heroes of old time did in the past.

"I have sent to my lord the Cardinal a present of furs, which I pray you see conveyed to him with my humble duty. The cloak of furs is for yourself, and the necklace of amber beads for your good lady. Your advice I follow in my way of life; but, my good Will, sometimes I do regret the old times, when you and I were younger, and fond of wenches; or, perchance, when they were fonder of us. Three things I look forward to seeing next Spring: the fresh face of an English country maid, a Royal pageant

on the Thames, and a bank of primroses with the rain on them."

Folding the paper neatly, he addressed it ; and taking a sardonyx gem from his finger sealed up the edges with four seals. Then returning the ring to his finger, he considered his small, white, fat hands, pursing up his lips, with a curious air of meditative self-satisfaction. Lifting up his eyes again, after this pleasant relaxation of the mind, he found Machiavelli, who had entered softly so as not to disturb him if he were writing, looking at him with a gently ironic smile ; and he started, somewhat annoyed that even for a moment he should have been taken off his guard.

"If you are occupied, Messer, I shall not disturb you. Do not move. I hope that you have asked for whatever you may have desired. Marietta tells me that you have been busy with your correspondence."

"I have also read a little," answered Cromwell.

"Ah, I see ! the *De Monarchia*. I marvel always, Messer, that in spite of the overwhelming evidence of human depravity, men are to be found in every age who base their conceptions of the ideal state upon the hypothesis that mankind is naturally good."

“ It is at least certain that each individual considers himself good,” Cromwell said.

A light smile was the only reply. Machiavelli wore a long Florentine cloak reaching down to the ankles ; loosening it a little he flung the ends back over the arms of his chair, and stretched his legs. His clothes were of the finest Florentine cloth, well-made, but a little worn—black and dark green in colour ; he wore a collar of fine linen fitting close about the neck ; his cloak was of brown home-spun. Every detail showed a scrupulous care for his appearance, but also a frugality of means. Cromwell, equally sober in his black and tawny, allowed himself little vanities ; a gold chain with pendant jewels, and the white lawn collar neatly goffered, as also were the wrist-bands.

“ Do you think this treatise a foolish book ? ” asked Cromwell bluntly.

“ Dante was great in everything,” answered Machiavelli. “ He could not write foolish things ; but he could be mistaken in his reasons, and as to the capacity of human nature. His ideal Emperor, his ideal Pope, would be gods, not men. His notion of the Church stripped of its temporal possessions is a chimera. As religion exists to - day,

asserting its precedence over the State, or even its opposition to the State, it splits society in two, and divides it against itself. The religion of the pagans was merged in patriotism, and before a greater stability in social affairs is possible, mankind must either return to that ideal, or religion be considered as a matter for every individual to practise as he thinks best."

He spoke with little or no inflection of the voice, resting his chin on one hand. As he sat always with his head slightly bent, when he looked at his companion, with bright eyes under compressed brows, his face had an expression of stealthy alertness.

"Yes," said Cromwell; "if we turn away from Italy, and consider the other nations, we find that in every country the Church has an organisation, powerful and rich, which the State has to bribe; but since the Church has this organisation, acting directly on the mass of the people, and willing to support the State, in exchange for certain privileges and immunities, our princes find it convenient to govern by its help; and since the greater part of government consists of temporary expedients, statesmen will not be led easily to forego this convenience."

“ That little book was written when Boniface VIII. sat in the chair of Peter. It is simply a protest against the ambition and arrogant pretensions of the popes. Innocent III. and Gregory VII. could launch their thunders against kings more or less successfully ; but the anger of Boniface went out like a flame fallen in water ; his selfish lust for power led to his complete downfall, and the victory of Philip. But Philip’s victory caused a revulsion of feeling in the Pope’s favour, so that Dante, though he hath thrust Boniface into Hell, yet calleth him Christ’s Vicar, and doth compare his sufferings to Christ’s Passion. Even Philip did not attack him openly, but used covert weapons, Sciarra and all the Colonnese being his secret allies, and carrying with them the gonfalon of the Church ; in what he did openly, Philip used traditional means, as summoning a council, and accusing the Pope of heresy. Still, I say to you that henceforth the great States will war continuously against the Church.”

“ And how should they attack her ? Upon what side is the Church to be assailed ? ”

“ Through the monks. ‘ The fat bellies of the monks ’ are become a proverb in Europe. Every people itch with the vermin. They

have made the practice of poverty the most lucrative of trades. Their greed, their lewdness, and their obscenity, are the matter of every ballad, and the butt of every wit. And yet they are one of the chief supports of the Church, ever replenishing her treasuries with the offerings of the poor, and the fruit of their traffic in pardon and indulgences."

"I have observed," said Cromwell, "that, though kings have often despoiled the monasteries, such depredations have not increased their popularity; for, though the people do not defend the property of the monks when it is attacked, after a time the weight of their opinion is on the side of the Church, and they accuse the officers of the State of rapacity and harshness, and the King himself of greed."

"The people are too often ground between the upper and nether mill-stones of Church and State," said Machiavelli; "to them both tyrannies are equally hateful. And, also, Messer, the plundering of the monasteries hath nearly always been an act of kingly greed, to furnish the material for war and forge the instruments of a harsher tyranny. But let the King make his people his accomplices. . . ."

He finished the sentence with a smile.

“Yes,” said the other slowly; “yes.”

He considered his soft, white hands, and pondered the matter as if it were an ordinary question of daily business. His fleshy face with a bright colour about the cheek-bones, the small, pointed nose, the watchful eyes, revealed nothing; but the mere quietness with which he considered the question was, in a sense, a revelation. Lifting his eyes again he spoke quietly.

“I see here,” he said, turning the pages of the *De Monarchia*, “that Dante attributes the great power of the Roman Empire to the direct action of the divine providence. The Empire to him is a thing divinely ordained, and Augustus is the divine monarch.”

“One must either attribute all things or nothing to providence,” said Machiavelli. “It was the opinion of Plutarch that the Romans confessed their obligations to Fortune by consecrating a great number of temples and statues to that goddess. It was to the courage of her soldiers that Rome owed the Empire, and it was to the wisdom and conduct of her administrators and law-givers that she owed its preservation. If fortune or God rule the world, then man hath no remedy against the evils of his time, and his prudence

avails him nothing. I am in part inclined to this opinion, since every day we see things happen contrary to all human expectation ; yet, at the same time, man is in some measure free. What I say, then, is this : that fortune is mistress of little more than half of our actions, and man himself is master of all the rest. In all things we may observe the action of certain laws, to which man is subject, but within the limits of which he hath a certain freedom. So, as a sailor, knowing the changes of the tide and wind ; how it bloweth from the shore at evening, and from the sea at dawn ; and knowing also the mysterious currents in the sea, and the hidden shallows, and the free channels, and the stars by which he is to steer, may bring his venture into port, where one ignorant of these things would suffer shipwreck, the wise man judging of times and opportunities will use caution or courage, as best may serve the occasion. He will prosper most whose mode of acting is adapted to the change of times ; but no man is found so prudent as to know how to adapt himself to all changes, both because he is naturally inclined to follow one course, and because having prospered in it hitherto he cannot be persuaded to change. Moreover,

fortune is a blind and irresistible force, while the divine providence of Dante is mild and beneficent ; and though we have instances of fortune we have none of providence ; and to assert that fortune directed the growth of the Roman Empire is to say a childish thing, for fortune creates nothing, it rather destroys ; but it is man, adapting himself to fortune, who is the creator. Though we may say that fortune doth in a large measure control the works of man, we cannot say that the divine providence hath inspired or maintained in power, by its singular favour, any people. But every people succeeds or fails according to its wisdom in dealing with events as they occur, and in guarding against all probabilities of mischance."

While he was speaking, his son, Piero, came into the room with some wine for them, which he put upon the table. He was not unlike his father, with a small, close-cropped head and slightly aquiline nose, but the face had the softer outline and delicacy of youth ; something in the clean-cut features, the thoughtful brows, and firm lips, reminded Cromwell of a little head of Augustus upon a gem which he had seen at Rome, but even more, of a small head of Caligula, that debased

and weaker image of Augustus. Machiavelli smiled, took his son's hand, and talked to him in that spirit of grave banter which is customary with men when they talk to children, and the boy answered him readily enough, with responsive smiles, and laughingly, but yet a little embarrassed by the presence of their guest. Presently his hand was released, and he slipped silently out of the room.

“It is sad when one thinks of the great empires of the past fallen into decay, and all their work perished, so that nothing of them can be said to remain except a shadowy legend and a name.”

“Yes, it is sad; but it hath always been so,” answered Machiavelli. “Everything is subject to change and death. Do you know these lines of Dante, since you study him ?

“*Atene e Lacedemone, che fanno
Le antiche leggi, e furon sì civili,
Fecero al river bene un picciol cenno
Verso di te, che fai tanto sottili
Provvedimenti, che a mezzo novembre
Non giunge quel che tu d'ottobre fili.*”

“They are nothing but a song in our ears. And yet we may comfort ourselves. For I believe that the world has always been the

same and has always contained an equal mass of good and evil, but I believe also that this good and evil passes from one country to another, as we may see by the records of these kingdoms of antiquity, which, as their manners changed, passed from one to the other, but the world itself remained the same. There is only this difference, that whereas first the seat of the world's greatness was at Assyria, whence it passed to the Medes, thence into Persia, until finally it came to Rome and Italy, and though no other Empire has followed which has proved lasting, yet now the greatness of the world is diffused through many nations, in which men live in orderly and civil fashion. Everything is subject to change and the vicissitudes of fortune; but passing from change to change all things return more or less to their former state."

"I remember the lines. Tell me, Messer: Dante calleth Virgil his master; do you think the poetry of Dante similar and equal to Virgil?"

Machiavelli moved a little in his chair.

"There is a Virgil by your hand, Messer," he said. "Open it. Look at the print and paper; it was printed at Venice. So I like to read that splendid verse. And yet Dante

scarcely seems a poet to be read in print. I should like to possess his works written in a fine, neat, clerkly script, upon vellum, with little illuminations in the margin, angels in vermillion and ultramarine upon a golden ground; initial letters with quaint floral devices woven about them, heraldic monsters, the Gryphon with his car, Beatrice walking by the stream in the earthly Paradise. He chose Virgil as his master because, to him, Virgil was the sole Roman to whom the prophecy of Christ's coming had been revealed by the divine will; because Virgil himself had pictured the state of man after death; and, finally, because Virgil had been the singer of that Empire which Dante so greatly revered. The poetry of Dante has nothing of classical proportion; its unity is simply the unity of a philosophical system; its progress is like a pageant. But it is full of a sudden wilful beauty, a delight in natural things, moments of birdlike music when he speaks of birds, as in the lines :

*“ Nell’ora che comincie i tristi lai
La rondinella presso alla mattina,
Forse a memoria de’ suoi primi guai.”*

and when he describes the flight of cranes, or of the lark :

*“Quale alloodetta, che in aere si spazia
Prima cantando, e poi tace contenta
Dell’ ultima dolcezza, che la sazia.”*

It is like that delicate work of the illuminators, full of a kind of homeliness, a clear and luminous beauty; but it is not the same thing as Virgil's lines:

*“. . . et bibit ingens
Arcus: et e pastu decedens agmine magno
Corvorum increpuit densis exercitus alis.”*

I do not think that Dante is a lesser poet; but he hath not, and never can have, the same universal appeal. He is terrible, full of swiftness, and energy, and hatred; devouring his subject like a flame. No poet hath lines so horrible, so inhuman as:

*“due dì li chiamai poi che fur morti:
Poscia, più che il dolor, potè il digiuno.
Quand’ ebbe detto ciò, con gli occhi torti
Riprese il teschio misero coi denti,
Che furo all’ osso, come d’un can, forti.”*

It is an exultation of hatred, a luxury in disgust, a joy in brutal vengeance which cannot be paralleled. Turn from it to these lines out of the *Paradiso*:

*“O dolce Amor, che di riso t’ ammanti,
Quanto parevi ardente in quei flaili,
Ch’ aveano spirto sol di pensier santi.”*

and you have some notion of his wide range from tumult into calm. Will you not drink a little wine ? ”

“ This wine is excellent,” said Cromwell. “ As a rule I find the Italian wine a little harsh ; but this is suave and of a delicate flavour. You are a great lover of poetry, Messer. I see that your volumes of Tibullus and Ovid are much worn. ”

“ I carry them out with me when I go fowling, and read them beside the snares.”

“ I have little time for such pleasures, alas ! ” said Cromwell. “ Yet I, too, have great need of the poets, sometimes. I have read the *Commedia* closely. Tell me, Messer, since you have spoken of Dante’s political principles as enunciated in the *De Monarchia*, did not they suffer a change in the *Commedia* ? ”

“ Man’s ideals are broken as he hath greater experience of life. Dante, like all enthusiasts, fashioned to his own mind a picture of the ideal state, upon the hypothesis, as I have said before, that all men are naturally good. But if you consider his poem you will find that it is nothing but a record of crimes and their punishment, while even the crystal air of heaven is disturbed by denunciations of evil. His notion that the civil power is of God, and

that the Church should be subject to it, is expressed later with even a more vehement conviction in the *Paradiso*, by Justinian, the supreme legist. In the *De Monarchia* he says: 'Si romanum imperium de jure non fuit, peccatum Adae in Christo non fuit punitum'; and in the *Commedia* for having withstood the Empire, Brutus with Cassius still howls in Hell, and 'Piangene ancor la trista Cleopatra.' But, after his years of exile and wandering, he seems to have surrendered his faith in a kingdom, which should be of this world, and sought for justice and the triumph of the good beyond the grave, as so many others have, likewise; for in the next world we shall all be justified. Dante's poem is not like the *Aeneid*, an epic: it is an Apocalypse. The companion of his voyage is less the gentle Virgil, the maiden of the maiden city, than some later St John, continuing his fulminations from Patmos, judging all nations and condemning them. It is only in rare moments that he can speak a tender language as he does of the Florence of an earlier day, standing in peace, sober, chaste, with no houses void of a family; with her nobles in leather jerkins, and their ladies at the cradle, or the distaff, telling their handmaidens the tales of Troy, and Rome, and

Fiesole. Such is the manner of poets: to praise times past in preference to the present, and usually without reason. A little later, you will hear Peter condemning his successors, who imitate him in that calling which he followed before he followed the call of Christ, rather than in his later life:

*“Non fu nostra intenzion, ch'a destro mano
Dei nostri successor parte sedesse,
Parte dall' altra del popol cristiano:
Nè che le chiavi, che mi fur concesse
Divenisser segnacolo in vessillo,
Che contra i battezzati combattessi:
Nè ch' io fossi figura di sigillo
Ai privilegi venduti e mendaci.”*

Everything in the poem is a condemnation of this world. A sense of complete isolation has overcome the writer. He stands alone, neither Guelf nor Ghibelline, but a party to himself: the first Italian."

He paused, drank a little wine, and smiled tolerantly.

"I, too, began life in attaching myself to a party; and when my party was expelled I became a Florentine, and now, having considered all the cities of Italy, I am an Italian. But the great mass of my countrymen are still as Dante saw them, split up into numerous

factions, weak by divisions, a ready prey to any comer."

Cromwell stroked his chin meditatively and, discreet, said nothing.

"When our dreams have faded, Messer," continued the other, "we can only sit aloof, watching the comedy of life with at best a tolerant contempt, but more often hiding, under a mask of cynicism and sarcasm, the maimed heart that is in us."

The other was a little embarrassed, after a moment he spoke quickly.

"It seems, to my mind, Messer, that Dante's poem hath no progress, no dramatic progress ; beyond the pedestrian interest of the scenes described there is no motion."

"Thought can be dramatic as well as action," replied the other ; "but I am inclined to agree with you. Consider the poem as a whole system of thought starting from 'the master of those who know' and ending in the beatific vision ; consider it, next, as a denunciation of all the lusts and depravity of the world, typified, and made incarnate in historical characters : Francesca, voyaging for ever through the dusky air, on a wind that seems to symbolise her own passion ; Ugolino, turning his strong teeth upon that wretched

skull : consider, finally, the little illuminations which have made me compare the poem to a missal or a book of hours ; the terse phrase, the very simplicity of which bites like an acid, so keen it is. Then, I think, you will see how various was his mind. His poem is like a great life ; his words like actions, sometimes terrible and inhuman, sometimes like a mother's tenderness with her child."

Cromwell suddenly broke into a smile.

" Yes, yes, as you say, Messer, it is a whole system of thought. Nay, even more, it is the whole structure of a past age. But how simple ! How childish ! The people of that time seem to me like a few men gathered together at night round an open fire ; at hand is a cheerful warmth, and light, but a few paces away is the darkness full of terrors, and on the borders of darkness are monstrous shadows. They sit crouched about the fire, telling idle tales to beguile their fears, thinking that beyond that little glow of radiance is nothing, whereas, at no great distance from them is such another company round another fire. We have explored the darkness, and now the dawn is beginning."

" *Magnus nascitur ordo,*" said Machiavelli,

smiling. "How many ages have said the same thing?"

"But it is here. The new order is born. I am no scholar, Messer, but I have heard Dean Colet and Erasmus. The recovery of the Greeks hath let knowledge like a light into many dark places; the whole political fabric is dissolving, and flowing away into the limbo of dead conceptions. The secular power, which Dante wished, and which you wish, to see established, is here."

"Yes, it is here," answered Machiavelli; "but what is it going to do? Mankind is constantly labouring at an unknown task; and, in seeking to be free, doth often but rivet its own fetters more securely."

"What do you mean?"

"Take as an example the conflict between the senate and people of Rome. Marius having been made the champion of liberty is followed by Sulla the master of reaction; the fight is long, bitter, and when finally the people triumph they find themselves under the absolute rule of one man. Now this results from the fact that men worship the name of freedom, rather than the thing itself; those who fight in the cause of liberty are fighting for their own establishment in power

and, being established, they seek to protect themselves, and fortify their position as the central authority ; and, having been raised up by the popular voice, they are stronger than the power which they have supplanted ; thus it happens that the people warring against their government in the cause of liberty do but increase the power which they have aimed to destroy. The present struggle is to rid the State of the interference of the Church : to found greater States. The popes have destroyed Italy by playing off faction against faction, and city against city, in the hope that by this method they might become supreme over all ; but having introduced disorder into every town, and destroyed all civic morality, they have also lessened their own power ; for these states and cities were the Church's bulwarks against the invader. Now, whatever may be the issue of present affairs, the Pope must become subject either to the Emperor or to the King of France. This is the nemesis of their policy. The liberty of the State will be achieved, at least in a great measure ; but the State being stronger will be more absolute, more tyrannous. The solvent of the new learning, as you call it, will be smiled upon by kings, so long as it doth help

them to rid themselves of the Pope ; but it will be repressed the moment that it shows any desire to alter or limit the power of the States."

" Yes," answered Cromwell ; " but if they once let in the flood, it will be too late to think of building a dam."

" When I was a young man I remember to have heard Politian," said Machiavelli. " But I think that the enthusiasm which began with Petrarch, and continued into my younger days, has died down. It is true that our studies are better organised : we have the academies ; but learning in Italy at the present day is rather a polite accomplishment than a serious business. It hath not penetrated the mass of people. To them, the two bases of the social order are still the Pope and the Emperor, as in Dante's day ; and they condemn the new learning as tending to overthrow these bases, and so destroy the whole fabric of society. The monks point to Erasmus as the cause of the present troubles in Germany."

" Erasmus doth seem to me to be the one wise man," answered Cromwell. " He steereth a middle course, condemning the fanatics on both sides. It is his wish to avoid any tumult, and merely to further the growth of

light and reason; for he is persuaded the whole evil of the time comes from ignorance. Colet, such another man, was persecuted with accusations of heresy, so that he thought well to withdraw himself from the public eye. But neither of these men desired to overthrow the Papacy or to promote a schism; for they thought, if I remember aright, that such methods, with their incidental violence, would only prejudice the cause they had at heart; their aim was to act upon the Church from within, to reform its abuses, to root out this pestilent brood of monks, and to promote a healthy growth of lay opinion. To Erasmus the German schismatics are no whit less ignorant or less intolerant than his old enemies the monks, and equally entangled in the webs of vain theological sophistries. He believes that the great influences are secret, and of slow growth, gradually penetrating all things; and he seeketh to form a party of intellectual men, who shall work within reasonable limits, acting as a new leaven to leaven the whole lump."

"I have little faith in such an influence, except as a preparation for the combat," said Machiavelli. "What I praise in Erasmus is that clearness of judgment, which insists that

the Bible should be read as any other book, that each man should go direct to the source, and fill his own vessel; for by that means they will recognise the chicanery, which isolates texts and phrases, and distorts their sense. But not by any gentle methods will the regeneration of Europe come to pass. There is a stir, a commotion of minds, abroad, which is testing the pretensions of the Church, and rejecting them one by one. The sands are shifting beneath the foundations of a structure we thought builded upon a rock; and though as yet the fabric stands, it showeth great rents. So: the Pope and Emperor remain to the majority the bases of the social order, as I have said, and soon it will be perceived by all men that the humanists, in playing with questions of grammar, have trespassed upon matters of faith: a crime not serious in itself, but exceedingly grave when after reflection we learn that it compromises temporalities. Men have not yet clearly seen this danger, though a few, perhaps, have suspected it. And, when the reaction against humanism sets in, upon what arm will the humanists rely to defend them?

“They will by that time have created not only a large following, but a temper among

the people. I myself, Messer, have great hopes of our young King of England, who hath grown under the influence of men similar to Erasmus. He hath a royal nature, a dominant will, a power not only of making his people's aspirations his own, but that supreme gift in a ruler which can make what is to his own private advantage seem a matter tending to further the public good. Though as yet he be not fully tried, this much I will venture to prophesy of him, that no hindrances in the path he chooses will prevent him, and that no man in his realm of England who fails him once will fail him again."

"You are either very fortunate, or very unfortunate, to have such a prince," said Machiavelli, with a smile. "But humanism is of recent growth in your country. It must be followed by reform. And, if your King hath that quality of true kingliness, which maketh the aspirations of his people his own, would he withstand reaction?"

"I cannot conceive that one of his nurture and character should be found on any side but that of reform."

A light, incredulous smile played upon the other's face.

"It might be politic," he suggested.

But Cromwell protruded his under-lip obstinately.

“I cannot conceive the possibility,” he said.

Machiavelli shrugged his shoulders, leaned back in his chair, and looked at his guest over joined finger-tips.

“He hath written against Luther, but rather for the reasons of Erasmus than for those of the monks,” said Cromwell slowly. “It is even conceivable that if he once take up the business of reforming the Church in England, he may be forced into a more extreme position; I mean into a denial of the Pope’s authority, and a position similar to that of the followers of Luther. In that case, I admit, the war will be between two extreme parties; but it would be difficult to say which he would support, or how far he would be compelled to go. Certain it is to me that he will ally himself with whatever party is likely to serve his own ends, and will not forsake them until they have gained him what he requires. Then, indeed, he may cast aside the tool, which he hath blunted by use, and choose one keener; yet, in reality, he would be but sacrificing the show for the substance; and his vicegerent will always be the man who discerns his will and executes it. Thus, his policy will be

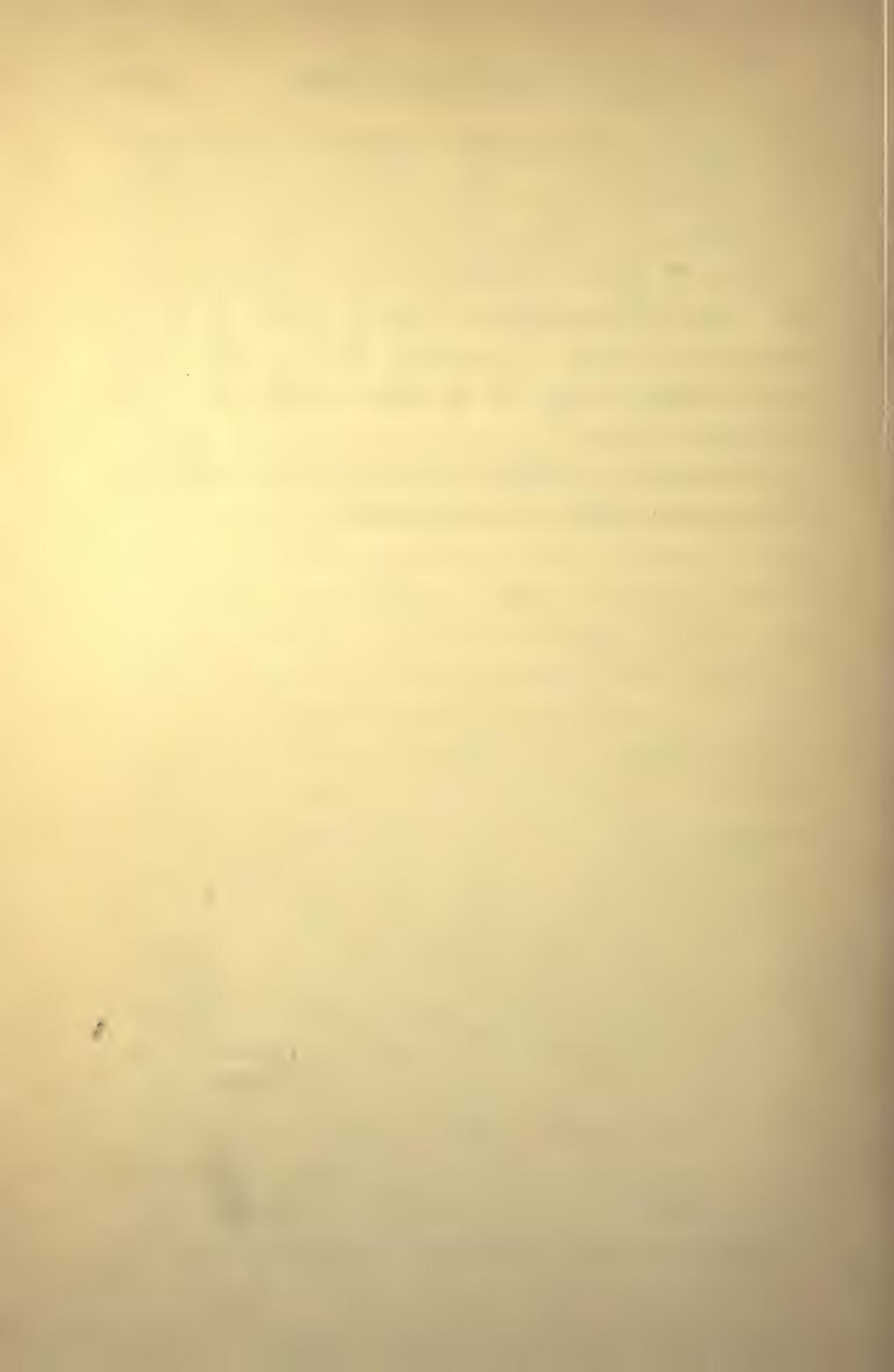
consistent, though his ministers change; for at times perhaps, since the people always blame those who surround a prince as the abusers of his confidence, he may find it necessary for him to discard, or even to sacrifice one, whose sole fault is in the thoroughness with which he carries out the royal will, for often in history we read of the sacrifice of a minister in order to lull popular feeling. Witness the example, which you yourself give, in your treatise of *The Prince*; where you show how Messer Remiro d'Orco, Cesare Borgia having set him over Romagna, by the sternness of his measures soon cleansed it of evil-doers and reduced it to order, for which his master, fearful lest the harshness of his lieutenant should be attributed to himself, rewarded him with axe and block, exposing the severed head in the market-place of Cesena. Thus, though he had himself commanded the severities which his lieutenant practised, he escaped the odium consequent to them, and was hailed by the people as their deliverer."

They sat for a little time, silent, in the gathering dusk.

"Still," said Cromwell thoughtfully, "there must be ways of avoiding the ingratitude of

a master: either by the minister imputing to the King openly, and upon every possible occasion, all actions, whether of good or evil; or else by his fortifying himself with powerful friendships, and seeking in every way to gain the voice of popular favour, so that becoming greater than his master he may withstand him."

Machiavelli shifted a little in his chair, and the darkness hid an ironic smile.



To ALBERT HOUTIN

VI

THE PARADISE OF THE
DISILLUSIONED

VI

THE PARADISE OF THE DISILLUSIONED

“THE final *Vale!*”

He spoke, and lay silent. The dim figures in the crowded room seemed to slip away from him, his mind ceased to grasp at earthly realities, a thick darkness enveloping it and them ; but the frail, wasted body still clung insatiably to life, and answered the phrases of the litany with long quavering sobs. At last it, too, resigned its hold on life. He seemed to see again, for one brief moment, the kneeling cardinals ; and then to join some great current of being which swept him away beyond the consciousness of time and space. Gradually another consciousness dawned on him. Upon the golden brown clouds, which seemed to limit his vision, there was projected suddenly a huge grotesque figure ; the shadow of a being more or less similar to man.

"Is it a devil come to torment me?" he wondered incredulously.

As the shadow advanced it became smaller; he noticed that it seemed to have talons.

"It is a devil."

But even as he spoke the shadow melted about him, and out of the golden mist came a strange-looking man, with a large, ungainly head, gray hair in rather long straight wisps, and lively intelligent eyes of a clear blue. The figure was absurd, gnome-like, with a pear-shaped stomach. The finger-nails were very long. The stranger bowed, smiling, as he approached, and spoke in a pleasant voice.

"Monsieur, je suis charmé de vous voir. Etes-vous, par hazard, de notre petite planète terre?"

"I am Gioacchino Pecci," he answered.

A livelier interest was apparent on the other's face; the smile became ironical.

"It is curious," he said after a pause. "It is curious that we should have reached the same paradise. On earth, Your Holiness, I was Ernest Renan."

"But is this paradise?" said Leo uneasily. "Je n'ai jamais cru——"

"It is the paradise of the incredulous," answered Renan. "There are many para-

dises: that state of being which on earth was called hell is the paradise of those given over to animal passions. The paradise of the ascetics is an eternal Shrove Tuesday, with the eternal prospect of an eternal Ash Wednesday; the case of Tantalus reversed and made pleasurable. All good Buddhists have attained Nirvana. The righteous Mahometan is distracted by the charms of innumerable *houris*. We Epicureans enjoy that moment which is eternity; and every man is justified in his own eyes."

"It is charming," said Leo.

"It is more," said Renan; "it is rational. How puerile is the mortal conception of paradise! Man has imagined a place where virtue is rewarded and vice punished. He believes in it with a passionate conviction, because he is not quite sure. He forgets that virtue must be disinterested, or it ceases to be virtue. If man is capable of a free and unhampered choice between vice and virtue, if the distinction between them be clear and precise, and the reward or punishment entailed by the choice definite and finally revealed, mankind, then, is obviously divided into two parts: the astute and the infatuate. One feels immediately that both the reward and

the punishment are excessive; or else that vice and virtue have ceased to exist. However, in mortal things there is always an element of doubt, and perhaps the chief glory of man is born from it. Our choice is not entirely free, the distinction is not absolutely clear, the reward is purely hypothetical."

"Ah, M. Renan," said Leo, "why are you here? You were always a believer at heart; one might almost say a scholastic. You invented a system of doubt, as others might a system of faith; even your doubts were affirmations. Science with you was only a synonym for God, and round it you constructed an hierarchy of saints and martyrs, a church suffering, militant, triumphant. Lucian——"

"He is here," said Renan.

"Lucian," continued Leo, "imagined the soul of Plato inhabiting a paradise constructed after the model of his own Republic. I imagine you projected into that strange future which you announced in your *Dialogues Philosophiques*."

"Doubt must be systematic," answered Renan; "but there is no need for system in religion. The essence of a creed is in its assertions, not in its arguments. Its argu-

ments are nearly always a series of after-thoughts, of apologies; its reason is always *à priori*; the very fact that an argument should be considered necessary is blasphemous and heretical. You exaggerate my scholasticism; but there was always in me the nature of a priest, and I could not put away from me my education, as I could put off my ecclesiastical dress. I imported the unction of a priest into the region of philosophic doubt, and by that means invented a substitute for faith. Science, in limiting the field of its researches, has increased the mystery which lies beyond. I became, as it were, the priest of an unknown God; and the first article of my creed was, that perhaps he did not exist at all. 'Sois bénî pour ton mystère,' I cried in my *Magnificat*; 'bénî pour t'être caché, bénî pour avoir réservé la pleine liberté de nos cœurs.' The *Dialogues Philosophiques* were written at a time when the whole thought of France was depressed and reactionary. They were a play of intelligence upon contemporary ideas. Progress does not tend to establish a scientific aristocracy at the head of its affairs; science is progressive because it has saturated the commercial classes with its ideals; it has increased production, and

economised in by-products. This alliance between democracy and the scientific spirit is the unique characteristic of our age. I think, myself, that society is tending to adopt the Chinese model. Kingship, the State, the present conventions of society, may continue to exist in atrophied and rudimentary forms ; but I imagine the whole earth in a few thousand years regulated by examinations and trade-unions, with an effete mandarinate surviving amid the débris of the ancient order, like the solitary column of Phocas in the Roman Forum, or the teeth in an embryonic whale."

"In this paradise," said Leo with an elusive smile, "you have, doubtless, infinite leisure for the discussion of these academic questions."

"Naturally," answered Renan ; "and we have a little Academy modelled on the Académie Française. I hope, Monsieur, to have the honour of welcoming you among us, and of replying to your *discours de réception* ; it is an amiable duty which my colleagues have delegated to me. Sometimes ; it is what remains of my mortal vanity, Monsieur ; I imagine that I have some talent in these things."

Leo had intended to be ironical ; but his

own vanity was now flattered. One ambition is always left to those who occupy a throne ; it is to be considered equal with the great.

“ Your response, Monsieur, will be my apotheosis,” he replied. “ But, tell me, are you become a socialist ? Your prophecy of the reformation of the earth on the Chinese model seems to point that way.”

Renan smiled.

“ No,” he said ; “ the Chinese are not a socialistic nation. They have not the notion of the State which is peculiar to socialism. But they are a nation governed by trades-unions and examining boards ; and through the same institutions we may arrive at the same stagnation. Our progress at present seems to follow that direction, because the aim of our materialistic civilisation is to make everything cheap, food, education, state-offices ; and its final effect will be to make men cheap, then we shall have large, flat, arid masses of humanity, to whom few luxuries will be possible, and the forms of our civilisation will become stereotyped. As it was with Babylon, Assyria, and Egypt, as it is with China, so it will be with us. Evolution is the progress from homogeneity to heterogeneity ; but the process is not indefinite.

“ After a race or a nation has produced a great number of diverse personalities, it becomes decadent and tends to produce a single type: the process of evolution is arrested, and the race may either lie dormant for centuries, if like the Chinese it has been prolific and exists in sufficient numbers; or, if sparse and scattered like the Phoenicians, they may be completely annihilated by their more vigorous neighbours. Socialism is neither a remedy nor a disease, but it may be a symptom. No society has been free from socialistic groups. Jerusalem had its *ebionim*; there was the eclectic philosophy of Rome under Nero, the Flavians, and the Antonines; primitive Christianity was communistic, and Neo-Christianity under Joachim of Flora and St Francis was an imitation of it. The Jacobins had communistic notions. The poor, the humble, the oppressed have always been liable to the dreams of millenarism; and the difference between the Maccabean aspiration, which was, according to Daniel, to establish the kingdom of God upon earth, and the aspiration of Robespierre, who wished ‘to found upon earth the empire of wisdom, of justice, and of virtue,’ is merely the difference of time and place. A beautiful, but intangible

vision ; a divine inspiration ! Like all divine inspirations, alas ! it is by its nature impracticable. Imagine a sudden uprising of the proletariat, a vast social movement, an European revolution. Slowly, after its momentary chaos, a new cohesion would take effect. The abstract virtues, from which the movement had had its derivation, would become personified in our most popular legislators ; the new constitution would include, beside the disadvantages of an untried mechanism, many errors latent in the old patterns which it would necessarily follow ; and we should discover, after a series of futile and extravagant adventures, that the laws which govern society are essentially natural laws, the slow growth of tacit acceptance, and not merely the dusty records of a popular legislating assembly. Mankind does not learn the lesson easily. One revolution engenders another, and eventually the habit becomes ingrained. The history of mine own country, from 1789 through the nineteenth century, a history of revolution, of the conflict between ideals and realities, is a signal and a reminder to the nations.”

“ You treat Christianity and Jacobinism as cognate ideas,” said Leo, after a pause. “ There is surely this distinction between

them, that one was almost entirely religious, and the other almost entirely political."

"Ah," said Renan, with a deprecating smile, "all religions are political, just as all politics are religious. Christianity with its notion of mankind as a brotherhood, and the Papacy with its notions of a spiritual empire, a suzerainty, over all peoples, have destroyed the ancient conception of the unity of Church and State. The religion of the Greeks was embodied in their laws; and the politics of the Jews, in their religion. The ideal conception of religion as something quite distinct from the State has proved unworkable, if not disastrous. All the churches have had to smite their mystics with the thunders of excommunication, to extinguish the inward light, to restrain the free play of thought. Even the most primitive form of Christianity, the Messianic notion, was purely political. If we are to talk on social questions we cannot separate religion from politics. The distinction between them is artificial; they are merely the opposite poles of a single idea."

"Ah, well!" said Leo, shrugging his shoulders; "the progress of humanity is a chimæra if it ends merely in stagnation.

These bleak, arid masses of mankind living without pleasures in their Chinese frugality, what future have they before them?"

"An awakening," said Renan prophetically; "the Kings of Uruk reigning over a decadent civilisation, Sardanapalus foreseeing the stagnation of his people did not dream of a future which they had helped to create. The process of evolution acts in tides; there is a continuous ebb and flow; the seed lies hidden in the ground until the wizardry of Spring calls it forth, and rain and sunlight nourishing it into new life, it ripens for the harvest. Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen. In the ruined palaces of Nineveh the beasts of the desert bring forth their young, and the green lizards creep out from the crevices to sun themselves upon a fragment of some boastful inscription; but the music which echoed in its painted halls, the dancing and the choirs, the great processions of its Kings, its wisdom and folly, its vain desires and failures, its tears and laughter, these have their being still, they move mysteriously in us, a breath would quicken them into life again, we can rebuild them in moments that seem to have all the profundity of time."

"Poet!" said Leo, with a smile creasing

about his lean jaws. "The world does not become socialist, it becomes Chinese; our civilisation tends to a variety of forms, becomes uniform, and then again becomes diverse in endless recurrence. Continue, Monsieur, but let us keep within the bounds of our own age. Socialism is a definite political force; and even if it do not triumph completely it must create certain new conditions. I, myself, have condemned socialism in one of my encyclicals. I have denied the sacred right of insurrection. Human institutions, which we may think have survived their usefulness, are in reality only waiting for their transformation, their character is moulded from outside. We may sometimes fail to understand their mission, or to grasp the reasons which impel them to follow certain paths, because these reasons are the pale reflections of some unappreciated causes. The world seems to progress, within the limits of natural laws, by a series of unforeseen developments. The future is latent in us; but the force which impels it is hidden."

"Yes," answered Renan; "some internal conscience directs all progress, and is the force which impels humanity on its way. This conscience has a secret action long before it finds a voice. Its influence at first is some-

thing subterranean and obscure; its bias is necessarily against the official creeds, but it moves against them slowly, informing them with the new spirit. I like to find this conscience acting through the poorer and humbler classes of the people, the folk who are of the soil, whose faith is something native and spontaneous, whose life and happiness depends upon the sun and rain. It is significant that all the gods were originally agricultural gods, that the history of every nation begins in Eden. To the artisan, the dweller in towns, whose whole life consists in turning out from a machine certain articles of a stereotyped pattern, the universe is simply a piece of mechanism; he is himself merely a machine, or part of a machine, performing a certain number of invariable motions to produce a definite and invariable result. He lacks inspiration, he has no vivid knowledge of the great element of chance which moves, like one of those primitive elemental gods, behind all human affairs, at times compassionate and friendly to man, at times bursting out into a sudden fury of wanton destruction. He demands a fixed wage, fixed hours of work, fixed prices for the commodities which he consumes, the certainty of a pension in his old

age. In a world of fluctuations and vicissitudes he demands absolute security. He is confident that he is going to do great things, that he has already worked wonders. With the aid of science and art, which he starves, he is going to make the earth pleasant and beautiful. He is quite confident that in a few generations he will be born in an incubator, and die, without pain, of sheer satiety. For him a fantastic assembly of politicians, removable at his own will, represents Providence and the divine wisdom. Is he less absurd than the savages who employ rain-makers and witch doctors ? I do not think so. Clearly he is not a person from whom we can expect any but the most crude and mechanical readings of life ; his vague, restless, childish discontent, that hunger for barren and tawdry pleasures which is characteristic of half-educated minds, that lack of intercourse with the great elemental forces of Nature, can issue in nothing but his own mental, moral, and physical damnation.

“ For any new readings of life, for any renaissance of art and religion, we must look to the simple folk, who are still close to the breasts of Earth : the folk who of old imagined Apollo as a herd in the service of Admetus ;

who found Demeter sitting by the well, and comforted her; who, after the vintage had been gathered in, took down the grotesque masks, which they had hung upon the vines to scare the birds and foxes from the grapes, and acted in them, singing the hymns of Dionysos to the music of pipes and flutes. Poetry religion, love, the three things which quicken life to new effort, are never far from the soil. The great conventional middle-classes, even those heretics from Philistia, the followers of Comte and Marx, the mediocre intelligences whose political principles are communist, and whose religious principles are positivist, these have little influence on the future. Socialism differs from all previous Utopian dreams simply because it lacks their vital energy; it is material and mechanical where the older ideas were spiritual and natural; it is lacking in a sense of morality, in a sense of beauty, in a sense of truth. You will not find the conscience of humanity in any of these creeds."

"It seems," said Leo, "that we do not know where we are going."

"You have said that human institutions are only waiting for their transformation," Renan replied. "An institution represents a need. It has been formed by the spontaneous action of the community; but the moment it

has been thus constituted it becomes fixed, and ceases to represent the living, developing forces which deposited it. Christianity at first was perfectly fluid ; the teaching of Paul was unsystematic, local, momentary ; but Christianity became a religion, not of inspiration but of authority, it crystallised into an hierarchy and perished. In the same way the idyll of St Francis and his companions crystallised into an order, and perished. They exist among us as monuments, these institutions ; but the same forces which crystallised them are now dissolving them ; the moment they cut themselves off from the stream of life they perished. I do not think that the future will differ essentially from the past. Socialism is simply the cry of the poor against the rich. Dives is well-clad and fares sumptuously every day ; no other crime is alleged against him, but these are sufficient to ensure his damnation. Perhaps the maker of the parable saw some peculiar virtue in poverty and suffering, which filled the heart with a spiritual grace, and uplifted it with moral fortitude. Perhaps he saw the wealth of Dives as poverty, as a lack of spiritual experience.

“ Socialism, however, does not share this

view; on the contrary, it asserts that wealth is the sole condition of spiritual grace and moral fortitude, and it is therefore bent on sharing with Dives the good things of this world. Consequently socialism has against it the two most deeply-rooted of human instincts, the instinct of acquisition and the family instinct; because it denies the right of possession and the right of bequest. How deeply-rooted the notion of property is we can see exemplified in France, where the abolition of the right of primogeniture has not had the effect which was expected of it, even the peasants in certain departments having held out against it. But if the power of bequest were entirely abolished, would people marry? The object for a legalised relation is gone, and the production of our kind becomes subject to the hazard of personal choice. It is possible that the State would have to intervene and make maternity an honourable profession under its own control, and that Plato's ideal of the State as a foster-mother would be realised. This notion has, I confess, a singular attraction for me. The substitution of a stock derived from careful selection of parents for our present inferior stock; the careful breeding of an aristocratic

caste, appeals to the imagination, as it shows the State actually realising what has always been its ideal.

“I could wish, Monsieur, that the socialists would form themselves into monastic communities, practising the virtues of obedience and, if not poverty, the community of goods. Yes; they should found a little Abbey of Theleme, and take their whole rule from Rabelais. They would not practise celibacy, but eugenics; and the education of their children would be the same as that devised for Gargantua by Ponocrates. So they would increase and multiply, and the whole earth would be filled with the glory of their names. I fear that, unfortunately, the first verse of what was written above the gate of Theleme would debar many from entering. But grant that this Utopia is possible; it is surely no less possible than the monastic ideal! And granted that a great aristocratic caste would arise, a dedicated folk, surrounded by the decadent populations of helots and hetairai, and that they would be able to gather into their own hands the supreme control of things? what would be the result? They would crystallise into an hierarchy, and perish. They would rule as

the priests ruled Egypt, and as the priests ruled mediæval Europe. They would resuscitate the double tyranny of the Church and State in one body. The whole progress of the last four hundred years has been toward individual liberty in thought and word. That ideal would be lost."

"I do not see the necessity of such ideals," said Leo. "I object to socialism because it would mean the absolute tyranny of the State, the despotism of a narrow and intolerant bureaucracy, tempered, as at present in Russia, by a more or less indiscriminate system of assassination. I have not the same objection to the tyranny of one man. A philosopher on the throne, Monsieur, your charming Marcus Aurelius for instance, may rule with wisdom and moderation; but an oligarchy of philosophers, like the Thirty at Athens: hell is naked before them and destruction hath no covering! Such experiments, as you say, infect the people with a lust for revolution. History, the only guide for political prophets, shows us that sudden disturbance of the social order breeds a whole series, whether such a disturbance occur among the ancient Greeks, or the Romans, or the French. The diverse natures of the peoples, the different

conditions of the age in which they lived, and of their political methods do not alter the central fact. Humanity in the lump is a beast more terrible than any in *Revelations*."

"Ah, no!" cried Renan, with a sudden vivacity. "There is the chief glory of the human race. They will sacrifice themselves for an impossible ideal. None of us can contemplate that great tragedy of the French Revolution without feeling cleansed by it. The enthusiasm of the people has a kind of terrible grandeur. In such moments of divine delirium all men assume heroic proportions. We may pity it for its fanaticism; we may pity it for being so easily duped; but it is impossible to deny its magnificent devotion to an ideal."

Leo was unmoved.

"You consider it a great moral movement, Monsieur?"

"Moral because all petty egoisms were obliterated," answered Renan. "Men seemed for a moment to become the incarnations of ideas. Oh, on both sides. Charlotte Corday, Danton, Madame Roland, Robespierre, Desmoulins, Larochejacquelin; each individuality seems to have had its definite mission, each

seems to have been equally necessary, equally an instrument of justice."

"You have said, Monsieur," continued Leo, after a pause, "that the socialists would revive in one form the twin tyrannies of Church and State, and destroy the ideal of individual liberty. You have also said that the ancient conception of Church and State was a unity. Would the kind of socialism which you sketch resemble the Greek State?"

"No ancient State, not even Athens, extended to its citizens the liberty which we enjoy," answered Renan. "The State intervened in the private affairs of the citizens; and Athens is notorious for having pursued the philosophers with accusations of impiety. The noble conservative families and the priesthood combined to stifle the new liberal thought. The State, however, was democratic; the people ruled, decided by their votes the policy of the State, and served on juries, or as judges. Socialism condemns democracy: it aspires to govern not by the will of the people, but according to its own interpretation of what it calls scientific principles; and it seems that in its application of these principles, it would be more bigoted and intolerant than the democratic State in Greece ever was."

“Nothing then is permanent, which crystallises into an hierarchy, or is limited by an institution,” said Leo. “It seems to me that your gospel is purely destructive. The whole progress of modern science is marked by the ruins of ancient altars ; you have freed mankind from all moral obligations in denying that he is a responsible agent, and in showing that he is merely a creature of inherited instincts ; you have shown him that his life is no more than a ripple on the water, a sudden stir of wind in the leaves, a momentary light in the darkness ; you have denied the God that his heart fashioned as a solace to his grief, a lamp to guide him ; you have taught him to seek for the perishable glories of the earth. How will you make him a moral being again ?”

Renan smiled.

“Our civilisation is not very deep, Monsieur,” he said. “There is always a large inert mass of humanity untouched by the movement of thought. From them we may expect a new religion, a new morality. We have denied and disproved, as you say, so many things, that at last we shall come to the sole reality. We have rendered man’s personality vague and mysterious, until it seems scarcely to exist except as a point of

development ; we must seek deeper for his reality. And in any case, Monsieur, you overrate the value of reason. In my charming walk through life I had sufficient experience to learn that man is not entirely a creature of reason. There are few people without a conscience. The fault of this age is not so much that it is scientific, as that it is mechanical and removed from the contemplation of Nature."

"I have sometimes thought," said Leo, "that the principal hope for religion lies in the fact that the lower classes do not think."

"It is true," said Renan ; "religion is some hidden consciousness working toward unknown ends. Mankind is not entirely reasonable ; it has a conscience. We can no more say that this conscience is an artificial product of society, than we can say that reason is an artificial product also. The curiosity which is so amusing a feature of the intelligence of cats and monkeys is an earlier stage of the scientific curiosity ; and, on the other hand, animals have shown gratitude to their masters, and thus the rudiments of virtue. Man, in recognising his conscience, has developed the abstract virtues of justice, of pity, of unselfishness ; it does not affect the main question that

his choice between virtue and vice should not be entirely free, nor that the distinction between them should not be always clear. We do not reproach science because it has not yet shown us what course our sun and its train of planets are taking in their journey toward a star in Hercules, nor because it has been unable, by its study of the rapidity and direction of other solar systems, to give to them an approximate fixity in connection with ourselves, to draw what would really be a map of the heavens.

“Oh, Monsieur, man is a naturally moral being, just as he is a naturally curious and scientific being. To him both curiosity and morality are natural needs, and because they are needs they are truths. It is impossible to consider a world which does not act according to a law of virtue, just as it is impossible to consider a world which does not act in accordance with the law of gravitation, or, better still, as an example, a species which has not developed in accordance with the law of evolution; and just as the scientist finds behind all the fleeting appearances and phenomena of the world a basis in matter, so, behind all the phenomena and fleeting appearances of virtue we find a basis in God,

And just as an individual is governed by his conscience in regulating his actions, so humanity as a whole regulates its actions by an appeal to some abstract idea of right. Such dramatic crises as the Revolution, and the establishment of the Roman Empire, seem equally the result of a certain slow consciousness working toward perfection; or take the growth of Christianity, which began obscurely and with a literally subterranean movement, is it not an instance of this blind working toward the light. One cannot outrage the collective conscience of mankind with impunity. A sudden outburst of popular resentment like the Revolution, which had been incubating for at least a century, cannot be considered as a mere caprice; can, indeed, only be considered as a revelation of justice. Such outbursts have a purely negative effect upon human progress; progress is the development of a new spirit, not the destruction of an old constitution."

"You offer no constructive policy, beyond the creation of a new spirit. Socialism, at least, pretends to one."

"Socialism is a reactionary force," answered Renan; "and all reactions are bound to be more constructive than a progressive force.

Their natural tendency, as I have already said, is to crystallise in a definite form. The spirit of progress is, on the contrary, an intangible if all-pervading thing. It develops spontaneously in a thousand ways, and as it pushes towards the unknown it is impossible for us to predict with any certainty what forms it may assume. Being purely experience, and not a creed, it is liable to be extensively modified or even completely changed by some unforeseen development in any of its parts; a discovery in any branch of science may react upon all, as the progress of palaeontology reacted upon history. That is the reason progress seems always to be a purely destructive force. It is only after it has escaped, through imperceptible degrees, into a more or less clearly defined new phase, that we can gauge its value as a constructive force in the last."

"I see with you, Monsieur, the value of democracy and individual liberty," said Leo. "Oh, I am reasonable. The character of a pope is to be found less in the official acts of his reign, than in the temper which he fosters in the Church. The nature of his office compels him to claim the privileges and exemptions which his predecessors claimed. He resigns nothing; but he allows some of his claims

to remain in abeyance, refusing to deprive his successors of a power, which, either for reasons of expediency, or through personal dislike, he declines to exercise himself. I came to the chair of Peter under disadvantageous circumstances. The Papal States had been lost, and in exchange the doctrine of a vague empire over spiritual things had been proclaimed. Infallibility was no new thing; but the enunciation of it as an article of faith crystallised a power which would have been of more value, if it had been left indeterminate. I won back much that Pius had lost. I made no use of the instruments which he had forged; I discouraged, rather than condemned, the liberal movements within the Church; my policy was one of insinuation, and, by skilfully leaving certain positions undefended, I gained that they should not be assailed. Alas, Monsieur! you smile at this panegyric of myself; but I have left no one behind who would consider it an honourable office to praise me. The encyclical on biblical studies, and the biblical commission, were perhaps my two mistakes. The glorification of scholasticism was perhaps a mistake; but I rather think it diverted the attention of my flock. However these things may appear in

the eyes of the world, my reign was wise, temperate, and resulted in a great increase of power. I recognised democracy and republican principles. I attempted to win the people. I was defeated by the extremists on mine own side."

"An epitaph, Monsieur, not only on yourself, but on your office."

"Perhaps," answered Leo. "We do not know. The dead know so little of what is taking place on Earth."

"On the contrary," said Renan, "voyagers from the Earth are constantly arriving, and we are kept well advised."

"I can imagine a moderately successful issue to my policy if my successor should be a man of tact. Even if institutions be only the monuments of an idea, men must build them; and, in spite of your argument, I think a period of authority, at least of a more correct balance between authority and liberty, is setting in. I have still hopes for the papacy. Comtism, some one said, was Catholicism with Christianity left out. The qualifying clause is perhaps unnecessary. Comtism, socialism, internationalism, are all 'Catholic' ideas. To the Church the name of a nation is merely a geographical expression, it knows no frontiers,

no distinctions of race or language, it has no preference for any form of government, being superior to all. The Latin language is for it, a universal tongue, which no sane person could consider inferior to Volapuk or Esperanto. The Church, properly constituted, might draw into itself a great deal of this floating idealism. We might approximate our ideals. You would say, Monsieur, that we were all equally reactionary."

"All synthetic ideas are," said Renan. "Anarchism is in its essence more truly progressive than socialism, because it is for the individual. Socialism implies either that all men are made after the same pattern, that in certain circumstances they will act in a certain manner, or that external influences, education, and environment, will turn out a uniform model. It is an error. If education were all - important, the Church would not have lost ground consistently in Catholic Europe, where the Jesuits have had practically the whole of education in their hands for two centuries. If such a machine as the society has failed, though it was backed by the State, and spoke with a quasi - spiritual authority, one cannot imagine a State department succeeding. Liberty is the condition

of development, and education develops, it does not create."

"It is important, however, to control the means of development," answered Leo. "Of course our education would be modern."

"Monsieur, you spoke of an encyclical on biblical studies."

Renan's voice was seductive; Leo made a gesture of impatience.

"It was a mistake," he said quickly. "At certain moments the heads of any organisation are liable to be driven into a false position by their extreme supporters. My policy was to let things take their course; to assimilate what we could of the new spirit, and let the rest die without noise. My condemnation of Americanism was unobtrusive, and I did not condemn the French Liberal priests who were busy with biblical exegesis, because I saw that attacks on dogma do not interest the mass of people; nine Catholics out of ten do not know what they believe in: and if your methods of criticism, Monsieur Renan, had not been advertised by so many fanatics, you would have been read almost entirely for the sake of your style. There is a little man in France now, a little man with the smile and features of Voltaire, whose criticism

has rendered the work of all those tedious Germans, and your own, quite obsolete. Our good Ultramontanes wished to persecute him into popularity, and to advertise him by excommunication. They told me he was a heretic. Of course he was. All the Fathers of the Church were heretics. St Paul was a heretic. So was St Augustine. So was St Francis. So were Lamennais, Lacordaire, and Newman. But it is a pity that the world should know it. St Paul's heterodoxy laid the foundations of the Church. St Augustine's heterodoxy, that the sacred writings were not to be taken literally, built it up. St Francis's heterodoxy staved off the Reformation for three centuries. Lamennais and Lacordaire in France, Newman in England, infused new life into our veins. Let us point to the names of our sons and not to their works."

A subtle enjoyment illuminated Renan's face.

"Monsieur, you were always an enigma to me."

"It is simple," said Leo; "the impregnable rock upon which we build is simply the impregnable ignorance of the majority. Do you think that science can alter or influence

the emotions of the plain man? It does not touch him. He prefers to accept blindly a creed which he does not understand in order that he may devote himself to the business and pleasures of life. He has no time to pause, to question, to criticise, to select. He aims at euthanasia. His doubts, such as he has, are almost entirely subconscious; and for the sake of his own peace of mind he will attempt to stifle them if they lift their heads. The number of men who can look on life, the whole of life, with a tranquil mind is extremely small; and even these have their moments of failure, weakness, and spiritual lassitude, moments in which life seems a hideous nightmare, in which the individual, grown morbidly conscious of his own being, sees it as no more than an infinitesimal point in the great waste of time and space, the great darkness of eternity, wherein all the worlds at present existing are no more than a shower of sparks.

“Man, that creature of incredible vanity and innumerable petty egoisms, refuses to consider for very long the melancholy spectacle of a world hastening merely towards its death, and carrying with it his whole store of spiritual experience, of poems and philosophies, theo-

logies and sciences, which his forefathers have created, and his descendants shall renew. Therefore, when I considered the future of religion as an indispensable condition of life, and when I imagined further a kind of alliance between the proletariat and mine own Church, I based my calculations principally upon the fact that the great majority of men do not think ; indeed, that they refuse to think.

“Creeds may pass away, but the individuality of man changes, if at all, only by imperceptible degrees. Ages of faith and ages of scepticism recur, and give place to each other, with almost the same regularity as the ebb and flow of a tide. The age of Pericles was sceptical, the age of Caesar was sceptical, the ages of Leo X. and Louis XV. were sceptical ; but from age to age the peasant has sate by the fire after his day’s work, dreaming the same dreams, and hearing nothing of the world’s doubt. He is much the same kind of pagan as he always was. He has seized upon, in a way we cannot understand, the primitive, elementary conditions, which subsist in all religions. You were right, Monsieur, in tracing religion to him. He is its source. Perhaps he has never accepted Christianity ; but Christianity has accepted him. Laborious,

innocent, stupid, scarcely more human than the cattle, who are literally his foster-brothers, he looks out upon his little world with patient eyes, wondering ; and he brings us the fruits of the earth and the bread of life."

"I have said with Voltaire," murmured Renan, "that if a God did not exist we should have to invent one."

Once again a deep, ironic smile creased about Leo's jaws.

"You were perhaps right, Monsieur," he said ; "but we should prefer not to tax your ingenuity. The gods invented by science are always afar off ; or they sleep, perchance ; or they are concerned with their own affairs ; in any case they do not hear us when we call to them. I consider our Church capable of a larger growth if it will only remain silent on the question of dogma, which should be left like seed to grow and quicken in the earth. Time will obtain for any dogma a certain measure of tacit acceptance, because truth to the majority is merely something which has been said over and over again. Besides the psychological basis of my calculations, the fact that the majority do not think, there is the political basis. This has entered into a new phase. In the Middle Ages the

Church was allied with the State against the people. Its dogmas were enforced by the secular arm. Innocent III. was a kind of suzerain over the princes of Europe. But even here, already, the Church knew upon occasion to ally herself with the people, and threaten a king through his own subjects, by releasing a nation from its allegiance, and troubling its internal peace by an interdict.

“Since my predecessor, the Church has definitely adopted this policy; but with a more subtile and insinuating method. Infallibility relates not only to matters of dogma, but to matters of State, *quoad mores* as well as *quoad fidem*. You will remember, Monsieur, that Antonelli addressed a despatch to the Nuncio at Paris, in which he says: ‘The Church has never intended, nor now intends, to exercise any direct and absolute power over the political rights of the State. Having received from God the lofty mission of guiding men, whether individually or as congregated in society, to a supernatural end, she has by that very fact the authority and the duty to judge concerning the morality and justice of all acts, internal and external, in relation to their conformity with the natural and divine law. And as no action, whether it be

ordained by a supreme power, or be freely elicited by an individual, can be exempt from this character of morality and justice, it so happens that the judgment of the Church, though falling directly on the moral of the acts, indirectly reaches over everything with which that morality is conjoined. But this is not the same thing as to interfere directly in political affairs.' That direct interference we must avoid."

Renan seemed to hesitate before he spoke.

"It may be," he answered, "as you say, that mankind does not progress, but merely revolves. Sometimes I have thought so. But nothing is repeated in precisely the same way. Neither an individual, nor a society, is what it imagines itself to be, in its action upon the world. The Church, as it is considered by its adherents, is something totally different from the Church as it seems to its directors. Every individual, and every age, examines the gospels in a different light and from a different stand-point, just as they examine the movement of the planets, the structure of the earth, the conception of kingship, of the State, even of that most immediate object the body. The life of St Francis seems to spring quite naturally out of the mediæval world, with its

crude cosmogony, its notion of the universe as a huge mechanical toy in the hands of God. To such people the story of Joshua commanding the sun was not childish; miracles quite as wonderful were part of their daily lives; and the world for them acted not according to fixed immutable laws, but by the direct interposition of a Providence susceptible to the prayers of man. To us it is different. We cannot imagine a St Francis appearing in the modern world. The Church, Your Holiness, cannot control the new movement, which will either transform or destroy it; but in what will you suffer it to be transformed?

“The evil of infallibility is that it cannot retract, or confess to error. The Pope has been endowed with this fatal gift of infallibility, a personal charisma, and through it he has become an incarnation of the Divine Wisdom, even as the Dalai Lama becomes an incarnation of the Buddha. To the historian, the heretical Pope Honorius, condemned equally by Councils, and by his successors, is sufficient to disprove your claims. But the Church can triumph over facts of history. What it cannot triumph over is the spirit of the age. You have a large body of adherents, who describe themselves as Catholic without knowing what

the term implies. You have a smaller body, whose principal business in life seems to lie in reconciling, by innumerable sophistries and subterfuges, your dogmas with the modern world. The smallest body of all is made up of those of your adherents, who accept you as the sole fount of truth. But in each of these three sections there is not a solitary individual who accepts your teaching without colouring it with his own ideas. Each will explain a dogma from the point of view of his own prejudices, and only accepts it with a kind of mental reservation. Of course it always has been so. Your peril lies in the rapid exchange of ideas which characterises modern life, the ease of communication, and the lack of any effective machinery for preventing their diffusion. The moment any crisis arises you cease to act as a solid body; and the action of your leaders has far less influence upon public opinion than the action of your laity excusing, or justifying, or explaining, the multitudinous diversities which exist among you. If this lay action be not public, it is the more insidious. I have noticed that when any important pronouncement is published from the chair of Peter, your lay apologists make no sign. There is an ominous silence.

All are disenchanted. All are suspect. They seem to turn away, silent and troubled, from what they imagined to be the ultimate authority, and seek for their justification at the tribunal of their private conscience."

"Oh!" interrupted Leo brusquely, "I for one do not regret that these gentleman should be made uncomfortable. A lay theologian has no adequate reason for existing. It is altogether undesirable that laymen, mere amateurs, should concern themselves with these things."

"Eh bien!" said Renan. "It is entirely owing to the laity that a certain type of converts accrues to your ranks. Liberal Catholicism, though you and I know what a vain, chimerical, and ridiculous thing it is, is, as it were, the first step. Take Newman's theory of 'development' as an example. Newman is the prophet dearest to the heart of laymen; because, in a sense, his works are popular. The Anglican may read him as a classic, and, while enchanted with the magic of that exquisite prose, lays himself open to the attacks of a peculiarly subtile and insidious mind. A certain temper is created in him. He becomes receptive of Catholic ideas, and one watches him progressing more or less

unconsciously toward Rome, blind to his master's casuistry by reason of the ineffable charm. He is like one impledged with a morbid craving for some narcotic drug, gradually increasing the dose as its effect lessens. Liberal Catholics are the lures for such. Your Holiness had good reason for saying that the Church had been founded by successive heresies. The first step to a conversion is always a misunderstanding."

"It is perfectly true," said Leo; "but Liberal Catholicism is finished. Only Newman's hat protects him from censure. The doctrine of development ceased to have any value after the definition of infallibility. It was valuable as leading up to the definition, but afterwards it became an excuse for the introduction of novelties. Its sole value now is as a proselytising medium. But, Monsieur, why do we continue? The Church is dissolving; even Christianity itself seems to be dissolving, to take on a fluid, personal form. That singular body, the Society of Friends, alone seems to be untouched by the solvent of criticism. It has nothing upon which the solvent may act, no dogmas, no sacraments, no depository of tradition, no hierarchical organisation. It recognises only the inward

spirit, that informing and subtile essence which alone seems capable of interpreting the righteousness of God, a religion of silence, and of sudden illumination, a religion of patient hope, of resignation, of a tacit understanding."

"Ah," said Renan, smiling, "a religion without forms, without enthusiasms, is scarcely one to satisfy all men. It is fascinating to consider the future of Christianity. After Catholicism no other form will satisfy the Latins, and if criticism destroys Protestantism with its infallible Bible, as it is destroying Catholicism with its infallible Pope, these sophisticated nations will scarcely replace one object of worship by another. You have said that a religion needs an uncritical people, a people who do not think; so for any further development we must turn toward a less complete civilisation, to a virgin soil. Perhaps we find this in Russia. I can imagine that dreamy and unsophisticated people, who have kept unpolluted through the ages the temperament of wonder, reforming and developing the Greek Church. When their Revolution comes, whether it be gradual and humane, or a violent upheaval of disastrous passion, the Church will be metamorphosed; the

stock only will remain, and new boughs will be grafted upon it. I can imagine a great growth because the field has lain fallow for so long, and the modern spirit will scarcely touch it, not only because the new Christianity will be more flexible in itself, but also because the people will have inherited our results without having endured our conflicts."

The clouds in front of them suddenly trembled and parted; the figure of a man appeared.

"Mocenni!" exclaimed Leo.

He rose and went toward the newcomer.

"Who is Pope?" he enquired.

And the Cardinal Mocenni answered him in ill-humour.

"Sarto."

For a moment Leo stood, as if doubtful, without speaking.

"Sarto," he said at last incredulously.
"Sarto!"

"Well, Monsieur," said Renan, "shall we not continue our discussion on the future of the Church?"

But Leo had taken Mocenni's arm, and the pair walked slowly away.

“Sarto! Sarto!” Renan heard Leo say again, as the clouds gathered about them; and Renan smiled.

“It is clear,” he said, “that Sarto is not Leo.”

THE END.

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